EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE SMUGGLERS OF LITTLE SLAVE LAKE

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The Smugglers of Little Slave Lake
OR
The Trapper's Vengeance

By Col. Spencer Dair

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

SAUGEEN SAM JASMIN—The man who bore this name was a noted outlaw, who led his bandit gang in Alberta territory, British North America, in the vicinity of Fort Assinniboine, an out-post of the Hudson's Bay Company. Saugeen Sam located his gang on Rat Island, where in Little Slave Lake he could escape scrutiny. There he fought, robbed, and smuggled his ill gotten gains into the United States, where his plunder was sent to a "fence" in Chicago. All went well until Saugeen Sam burned the home of Dave Irving, the celebrated fur-trapper. Dave's aged wife was shot from ambush by Alsek, a Chipewyan Indian, and Dave then started out to glut his vengeance. The fight was a bitter one, in which Sam played a brave, although fruitless part. It ended in the Battle of Little Slave Lake, in which while only a few men were engaged, the list of dead and wounded put many historic skirmishes to the blush.

PONCE PLASSEY—There always is the man who might have been a man of parts had he let a career of crime alone. To this class belonged Ponce Plassey an outlaw member of Saugeen Sam's band. Ignorant, yet brave, he fought and "died with his boots on" in true gun-man style, and points the usual moral of the frontier of the world now rapidly sinking away beyond the Arctic Circle.

ALSEK—A Chipewyan member of Saugeen Sam's bandit gang. Assassination was as natural to him as his red skin, and he followed the line that leads the crooked red-man down to his grave without one effort to restrain the tide! He thought he had "got hunk" when he shot the wife of Trapper Dave Irving, but really only let loose a terrible story of revenge.

JELLACHICH—A Kogmollack Indian, who was the associate of Alsek, in his bloody attack upon white men of tried worth and who assisted in the burning of Dave Irving's home and the shooting of his wife. Jellachich met a merited doom, and lay unburied while buzzards pecked the flesh from his bones.

JIMMY THE DIP—A lawless young member of Saugeen Sam's thug band. He fought his way to fame's eternal camping ground in one wild moment of danger and then passed to his unmarked grave, unmourned and hitherto unsung of those who write of the deeds of the quick-shot bandits of British North America.

DAVE IRVING—A trapper whose type is well known in the fur-countries away up in limitless forest and snow-capped mountains. Dave is a brave, simple old chap, who built a home in the vast wilderness only to have it burned by Saugeen Sam's band. How, aided by ghostly hands, apparently, he took his vengeance for the burning of his home and the shooting of his aged wife, is a "study in scarlet."

NATE SHELBY—Constable in the semi-military body, the Royal North-West Mounted Police; he was sent from Fort Assinniboine to Dave Irving's home to smoke out Saugeen Sam's bandit gang. How he went to the scene, and alone save for Dave's aid, played a hazardous game which skirted along Death's shore, and how he finally exterminated the band with the help of The Black Rider, is a story of hard fighting.

MRS. DAVE IRVING—Wife of the famous fur-trapper, and who knew how to use a gun and did, in spite of the fact that her shot started the flame of a bitter series of fighting events that only ended in her husband's vengeance in which she aided by what may be termed "ghostly assistance."

THE BLACK RIDER—A man of mystery, but who, while he seemed once to be a trusted member of Saugeen Sam's gang, finally throws off the mask, and becomes a surprising entity in the ending of the outlaws and the breaking up of the gang of Smugglers of Little Slave Lake.

CHAPTER I.
OUTLAW INCENDIARIES.

"Make the old woman set fire to thet thar house she has lived in fer twenty years," snarled the outlaw chief, Saugeen Sam Jasmin.

"That great plan," howled back Ponce Plassey, "shows yar a born leader!"

Plassey, who was as brave a man as his chief, and who had the record of never "backing water" no matter how desperate the deed of blood set for him by his

bloodthirsty leader, ran over to a half dozen men whose dark forms could be seen piling straw and hay along the side of a rough, plain board and log house in the dusk of early night.

"Two o' ye feller's get 'round ter the back!" Plassey shouted. "Don't let the old woman in thar git away an' be keerful an' don't kill her. I've got a job fer her to do thet 'll hurt her moren killin'."

Led by Jellachich, a Kogmollock Indian from Mackenzie River way, the men working amid the inflammable straw and hay rushed around to the rear of the house just as a gray-haired woman, gaunt, tall, and still handsome, stepped into the clearing in the rear of the house that just bit out a slight space from the forest.

The woman's hand went up as she stepped from the door.

The outlaws made a rush for her, but the revolver she held gave forth a ringing report, and the leading outlaw, an Indian named Alsek, from Peel River, clapped his hand to his side, spun around on his heels and fell to his knees with a bullet in his ribs.

"Ketch her gun!" shrieked Ponce Plassey.

The outlaws closed in upon the woman, whose flashing eyes breathed the spirit of War, and wrenched her revolver from her hand.

Even then she struggled with all her force, but after all was powerless.

The outlaws, fortunately for her, did not appear to be angered at the bullet she had sent into the body of their companion, Alsek.

While they roughly disarmed her and bound her quickly with a rope that Ponce Plassey produced, they did not hurt her in the disgraceful operation more than they could help on account of her determined struggles.

They did not gag the woman and when she was bound she indulged her feelings by a powerful summing up of the bandit gang which had made an unprovoked round-up of her home.

"Take her 'round th' house ter th' chief," cried Plassey, as he stooped over the writhing form of the Chipewyan, Alsek, "she talks pretty straight ter us 'bout the way she shoots, judgin' from the kickin' this feller here is makin'."

While the gang took the woman to the chief, Plassey did a little rough border-style surgery on the Indian, and the wounded man, a fine type of the Indian of the great North-West country of British North America, at length sat up with the bullet extracted, a bandage about him, and not much the worse for the wound save a sore side, some spilled blood, and a roiled temper.

"If you Chipewyan's would keep ter yar fartherst Nort' game an' not come down hyar ter the Little Slave Lake country in Alberta territory of this hyar British Nort' 'Merica, ye wouldn't git holes plugged in ye, see?" said Plassey to Alsek at length.

"Ugh! Me git hunk!" sententiously said the Indian with the laconic intent to murder the woman who had shot him evidenced in his hateful face.

"Don't ye try ter git hunk, wit' thet woman, fer she'll put her next bullet whar it'll send ye ter yar Happy Huntin' Groun's—and I ain't sayin' I ain't sorry ter see thet she didn't do it this trip—I don't see why Saugeen Sam keeps takin' on Injuns in our gang. They's enough white men hyar thet'll do ter keep us goin' wen we wants re-croots witout takin' on a lot o' red truck what ain't no good ter us er themselves nuther."

Alsek who heard the uncomplimentary remarks made by Plassey as to the noble Red Man of the Forest and Plain, as they are called in story-books, appeared not to have heard the remark. Indians know when the time comes not to hear certain remarks; and also know when they ought to hear, quite as well as their white brothers.

"Now ye go ter the Ree-ver," added Plassey. "Ye git in one o' them canoes an' lay down. Thar's a hole uv some size in yar red-skin, but tain't a killin' matter an ye'll be all right in a while."

Alsek, impassive as ever, disappeared in the forest, and Plassey walked leisurely back to where he saw Saugeen Sam questioning the aged woman.

"Look hyar," Plassey heard Sam yell as he neared the conference, "we ain't er goin' ter take no truck from ye—an' the sooner ye larn thet th' better!"

The woman looked Sam, the outlaw, in the eyes with a sneer.

"You don't think that I am *afraid* of Saugeen Sam Jasmin, leader of *The Smugglers of Little Slave Lake*, do you?" the woman cried with a fine air of utter contempt. "Why, I've known you and your gang since you came here three years ago and located on Rat Island out there in Little Slave River. Your gang is like most of the outlaws that seem to infest certain parts of this fair land, just a band of thugs, murderers, smugglers and thieves——"

"Shet up," snarled Sam. "I ain't agoin' ter stand fer ye or yar tellin' me wot ye think uv me. What I want ter know is whar's yar husband—whar's Dave Irving, The Fur Trapper? We are arter him, old woman!"

The laughter of Mrs. Irving, wife of the celebrated Fur Trapper, for whom Sam was asking, was mocking and sarcastic as it echoed through the woods.

Mrs. Irving, past fifty and with a life of toil and frontier privations before her, was not of the stuff that bends the "fawning hinges of the knees" to any man or woman, and not at all to the outlaw, Sam Jasmin, although he was a terror to the district and a name to frighten one to the core, due to his far reaching deeds of blood.

"If you mean David Irving, my husband," the woman cried, "you know well he is not here!"

"How did I knaw he ain't hyar?" grumbled Sam.

"If he had been do you think that I would be a prisoner here? Do you think if I hadn't been alone in that house where we have lived for twenty years undisturbed that you would have been enabled to imprison *me*—why Sam, outlaw and thief, you know better than to think my husband is here any where—if he had been, there would be some dead thugs lyin' out in the clearing," snapped Mrs. Irving.

"Where is Dave?" questioned the bandit leader.

"I have no wireless telegraph on my house—if I had I would send for Dave to kill a few of your vermin quick. If you hadn't got me by surprise when I knew you were getting ready to burn my house over my head, I would have got some of you, at that—did I kill that Indian I shot at? I hope so!"

Saugeen Sam cowered before the vindictive gleam in the eyes of the intrepid woman.

Well did he know that if Mrs. Irving was free with a revolver in her hand that she would give a good account of herself. She was famed all over the frontier world as a woman of undaunted courage and resolution. Her action when taken by surprise as she had emerged

from her home, thinking the rear entrance to the house was unguarded, was one that indicated her alertness when attacked—and the bullet wound in Alsek's side indicated that she knew how to shoot any time she found it necessary.

"I wants ter knaw when yar husband was hyar last?" cried Saugeen Sam, at length.

"None of your business!" cried Mrs. Irving. "You're lucky that he ain't here now."

"Wall, we are arter him," growled Ponce Plassey, the most implacable outlaw in the gang of bandits who, standing near, was getting weary of the verbal battle.

"Oh, I know, Ponce Plassey!" shouted Mrs. Irving. "You have been out of my books for a long while. But I haven't forgotten you—have you been to jail since I last saw you?"

The cluster of bandits broke into laughter when they heard the remark. There were some in the band that did not like the ascendency of Plassey, who came from Bitterwater Creek district in Montana, and in disposition had seemed to take on some of his bitterness from the water of his home country.

Plassey swore under his breath but thought he had better not "chin in" further; Mrs. Irving carried too much language for him to hope to cope with.

He was a short, thick-set, bearded thug, black as the deeds he loved, and of great strength and undoubted courage.

He was probably a braver man than his leader, Saugeen Sam Jasmin.

This famous bandit was six feet two inches tall in his stocking-feet. He was broad shouldered, of superb physical development, and was proud of his long hair which he allowed to grow so that it floated on his shoulders, and of his huge curling black beard, which concealed his heavy chin, his firm thin-lipped mouth, which gave to his scarred, fierce face the deadly look of the bad-man.

All that was known of Sam Jasmin was that he had come into the Little Slave Lake region some five years before the raid on the Irving home, and had announced himself to be Sam Jasmin from the "Saugeen River in the Province of Ontaria, Canada."

That was all the introduction necessary in the wilds of the great North-West.

No one asked anything about Sam's early life; it would have been impolite to do so, not to say dangerous, for your gun-man, as Sam surely was, is a bit chary of telling about his home region.

So, the name "Saugeen Sam Jasmin" was tacked on to the stranger!

He began his life in the region he had adopted by the quickest road to fame he knew anything about; that was, to shoot on every provocation.

The frontier dance-halls, the border saloons are places where the appeal to the gun was the usual way to settle the most trivial argument.

Saugeen Sam appealed often and late.

The notches on his revolver handle indicated the men he had "got."

The notches had been indented up to seven, when the peaceable people in the territory woke up.

Population, even of gun-men, who were "slow on the draw," could not be reduced so savagely by any man, the decent men of the region about Little Slave Lake, wild, and little populated as it is, decided.

In one of those periodic outbursts of law and order, as Sam termed it, he was swept on the crest of a Reform wave away from the settlements and out in to the wilderness, just a few feeble steps ahead of a Reformer who carried a rope with a significant hangman's noose at one end of it.

Then Sam had started in to form a gang of outlaws to war upon all organized society.

He had attracted to his ranks a host of bad-men, gun-fighters, Indian thugs and general worthless criminals with a sprinkling of half breeds, and had infested Rat Island in Little Slave Lake as his headquarters. Human and animal vermin lived on the island, and subsisted by crimes of more or less wantonness on each side.

The animal vermin attacked everything animal they thought they could get away with; the human vermin adopted the same policy.

In the fighting of the two classes of vermin, Dave Irving, a trapper who had been long favorably known as an honest man, and good fellow, had been sturdy.

He had incurred the enmity of the Jasmin band, as a result; the shooting up of his home was a deed of vengeance that Sam Jasmin and his men had planned.

"I know all about you and the reason why you are here," now cried Mrs. Irving. "I know! You are after my husband, and now he isn't here you are going to burn our home over my head, and thus take your *vengeance* because my husband has openly said you were a menace to decent life hereabouts. Well, one thing beware of Saugeen Sam!"

"Beware of what?" cried Sam, with a deep oath.

"The vengeance of Dave Irving!" cried the indomitable woman. "Beware of *The Trapper's Vengeance!*"

"Death and furies, woman, shut up!" yelled Sam, now thoroughly angry.

"*Make the old hag start the fire that will burn up her own house,*" cried Ponce Plassey. "Don't ye fergit wat ye wanted this womern brought ter ye for!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the outlaws, who crowded about their chief. "That's the game—make the old hellion set-fire to her own home!"

A gleam of pleasure came upon Saugeen Sam's face.

"All right!" he cried. "Give her a torch."

"Never!" shrilled Mrs. Irving, as a blazing pine-torch was thus thrust into her hand. "You cannot make me set fire to the straw and hay you have heaped up around the home my husband and I have worked years to build and fit up. Never!"

"Throw her into the pile, let her burn with her house," yelled the outlaw gang.

Mrs. Irving wrenched herself away from the two bandits who grasped her with splendid strength.

Bound as she was she fought nobly.

She managed to totter away from the gang, and then——

A stream of light picked out of the darkness, that had sunk upon the terrible scene, burst from the shelter of the near-by woods, showing, as it lighted up the horrible picture of a woman's distress, the fierce mocking face of Alsek, the Chipewyan Indian, whose pressure upon the trigger of his rifle had made the light possible.

The crack of the Indian's rifle sounded.

Mrs. Irving pitched forward upon her face as the weapon rang its message, the torch in her hands fall-

ing into the flames which whirled in a breath all over the house, and thus the poor woman unwittingly *set fire to her own dwelling.*

An hour later a faint skein of smoke against the dark, night sky, was all that there was left of the home of the Irvings.

It looked as if Alsek, Chipewyan Indian had "got hunk!"

But had he?

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE OUTLAWS.

David Irving, trapper, stood on the sloping hill that led to Little Slave Lake, listening to the song of the wind gently stirring the forest around him.

Flowers were springing up in his path, but he did not see them. The clear gray water of the river meandered at his feet.

Across from him, in an almost lake-like bend of the river, Rat Island loomed silent, and somber.

Its wooded shores held well the secret of the outlaws.

In spite of the forbidding aspect of the island, and its frowning air of menace, Dave Irving was pointing toward it with the butt of his hard shooting heavy double cordite rifle, a big bore weapon to be used in the killing of the big game of the region.

A couple of central fire automatic revolvers dangled at Dave's belt and his long keen hunting knife was of the tried trapper kind, that could be used to either skin his game or cut-up an enemy with equal ease.

Dave Irving was a tall man, past sixty years, and with a red-brick complexion due to out of doors life.

In spite of his age, he was as strong as an average man in the cities not half so old, and in the primeval condition of men and manners in which his years had been spent, Dave had been burnished into a creature deadly as the .450 double-barreled rifle he carried and with a cutting-edge as keen as his knife.

Dave wore a close fitting deer-skin suit with a coon-skin hat that made him look half Indian, half white man but was suited to the work he daily followed, for it was a suit that best resisted the weather, and attracted less attention in its soft subdued browns, than any other he could have worn, many an animal thinking the deer-skin clad trapper was really a deer, when Dave crept softly up on the "windward side" to pour in his shot that added to his kill, and thus added to his income as a trapper and hunter!

The wage that Dave earned he had to fight for.

Loneliness, wild beasts, savage men, Indians, even the wiliness of the fur-bearing animals themselves in escaping his traps had to be reckoned with.

No quarter was given or asked on either side and the trapper had for many years borne himself well and had won what was affluence in the primitive life about him, when he ran afoul of Sam Jasmin's gang, and now knew that his home, which he had worked years to build and fit up, was no more—and his good wife——

When Dave thought of her his hand gripped his rifle with the strength of ten men.

His eyes grew dark with hatred.

His lips muttered a prayer for vengeance!

Woe betide Saugeen Sam Jasmin, and his outlaw band! There would be no danger that Dave Irving would not face to glut his weapons in the blood of the bandits—the crime of shooting his wife and burning his home cried out for blood-toll!

Dave Irving proposed to exact the toll.

Standing by the side of Dave was Nathan Shelby, always known, however, as Nate Shelby, a Constable in the ranks of the wonderful semi-military body of hard riders, and hard fighters, the Royal North-West Mounted Police, the fine organization that copes so often with the wild forces of British North America, and which slowly but surely is pushing the outlaw gunman down into his grave.

Nate Shelby had been sent to root out the Saugeen Sam gang!

One man against many?

Exactly!

But that one man was backed by the law of the land, something that sometimes had to be reckoned with even by the bad-men of the region.

There was a good deal of land and very little law it sometimes appeared. In this case it was, therefore, a question of wonder as to who would win—the outlaws or the law?

Constable Nate Shelby had no doubt in his mind as to the ultimate victor when he had been hurriedly sent for at Fort Assinniboine, the Hudson's Bay Company fur-trading point nearest the scene of the crime committed by the outlaws; and he had hurried to Dave Irving when the latter's cry for aid came echoing to him by a half-breed runner who had negotiated the three hundred miles of forest and plain, shadow and sunshine, mountains and valleys that separated Dave from Nate the night the home of Dave was shot-up, burned and the good wife of the old trapper shot.

Nate wore the uniform of the force to which he belonged and was as well provided with weapons as his companion.

The two men were "fighting-men" from the soles of their high boots to the final hairs on the crowns of their heads.

They were out to fight—the silence of Rat Island held their foe, Saugeen Sam, Ponce Plassey, and the outlaws of the haunt, who were known usually in the region as *The Smugglers of Little Slave Lake.*

"There's the enemy!" said Dave to his companion.

The regular features of Constable Nate Shelby were wreathed in smiles.

"Good!" he said. "We must begin to get ready to try conclusions with the gang."

"That means a bitter fight!" said Dave.

"Of course!"

"It seems to me we hadn't better try to fight as we are—two men, no matter how good they are, can't successfully fight fifteen or twenty, for there's without doubt easily that many bandits in Saugeen Sam's gang."

"I see what you mean. You think we had better fight with some degree of under cover work."

"I do."

"That is, we had better try and make this a nice little surprise party to the bandits?"

"That's my idea!"

"A surprise party means a party to which there are no invitations?"

"That's so."

"You just drop in and make yourself at home?"

"Yes."

"Then we are just to drop in and make ourselves at home with Sam and his band, making our presence known when we get there?"

"Shore!"

"And bringing lead cake and powder pie to refresh the bandits with?"

"Yes."

"Well, how deep is the water between here and that island?"

"About ten feet on the average."

"The island is about a mile from shore—that is a pretty long swim—unless you know where there is a canoe."

Dave Irving smiled in a whimsical fashion. He knew the conversation was coming to his knowledge of the region sooner or later.

Dave was primed for the answer.

He knew the shores of Little Slave Lake as well as he knew the way to his traps. He had been flowing around the lake shore, like the lake and river named after it, for a quarter of a century and in that time a man ought to know the conditions of lake and river especially as Dave's house was only about five miles away as the crow flies and half as much more by the bending Little Slave Lake River.

"Come here," said Dave to Nate.

This stopped the conversation as Dave, softly crouching so as not to be seen by any one on the far off island, should watching eyes be peering to the mainland, hurried down to the water's edge.

He walked along the shore for about half a mile keeping well up in the wooded shady sides of the sloping shores.

Then he looked about for a few seconds until his eye caught a great rough cross hewed high up on the trunk of a monstrous pine-tree, where it required dextrous eyes to see the blaze, which the trapper had placed there to guide him.

Then Dave made a bee-line for the shore.

He stooped down where trees hung over the river, clothed with the summer beauty of green leaves.

Under this shielding canopy Dave fished for a moment.

Then he spun into view a canvas-covered birch-bark canoe, whose rather primitive lines suggested its Indian make but its width of beam and lightness and durability, showed that for cruising in the far reaches of the North-West no other craft could compete with it.

"Ah, that's good!" said Nate Shelby as he saw the canoe. "We won't have to swim over to Rat Island, will we?"

"No, not this trip."

"How did you happen to know this canoe was here?" asked Nate a moment later.

"Them canoes don't cost much," the trapper said. "I bought a lot of 'em of some Injuns that camped about this lake a couple of years ago—I staked 'em out here, you see, about the shores of the lake. I never know when I'm out on these shores when I want to be on land and when I want to be afloat so I just made up a little portage system of my own."

"Sort of taxicab game out here of your own?"

"You bet! That's it! I'm monarch of this line. I've got the canoes cached always in summer 'round this lake. I guess there isn't a mile that I haven't some way of getting on the water without going far to get a canoe—see?"

Nate laughed heartily but silently, a way he had been trained by the wish to indulge in a disposition of levity and laughter in the face of its being dangerous to make much noise, when engaged in his chosen profession.

"Well, now that the taxicab system of the great North-West is all ready, with your kind permission I will hop into that canoe, and we can paddle back to where we started from an hour hence in search of the canoe—no, that will not do either."

Dave grinned.

He knew when Nate spoke of taking to the water then his wood-sense would make him think better of it.

"I thought you'd take a second think on that plan," Dave said quickly. "There isn't much sense in sticking a seventeen foot canoe out in a lake-like arm of this river, just this side of the lake itself, where it would stick out like a red-flag so that if any of those unpleasant gents over on Rat Island saw it they would make it pretty much of a surprise party for *us* rather than a surprise party for *them* as we have planned."

Nate blushed a little. His wish to get at the outlaws had almost hurried him into a blunder; if possible it was imperative that the arrival of himself and Dave in the search for the outlaws' lair, must be kept secret.

The taking to the water in an open canoe in broad day light was about as foolish a thing as either man could suggest.

"I did not think," cried Nate, "that is for the moment."

"I know," replied the trapper dryly. "That 'didn't think' argument has planted many a good man in his grave."

"I'm willing to treat," said Nate with a smile as he pulled out a fat black cigar and handed it to Dave. "I see how one's enthusiasm can drag one into mischief."

"I'll smoke this later, when I can't very well be seen," remarked Dave. "I'll forgive ye, and seein' as you have treated we can between us portage (carry) this canoe back to where we were. It isn't much more than one good man could carry, eh?"

"That's right! Pull her in."

Soon the men were carrying the canoe high on their shoulders and in a surprisingly short time had reached the point from which they had started.

"We'd better cache our stuff," remarked Dave.

"That's a good plan. And we had better be sure we don't lose the stuff for while we might get along on the wild game about here, we like things of a greater variety," replied Nate.

The men then took from their backs the load each man carried while on a foraging expedition.

There was some flour, salt-pork, and bacon, sugar, salt, pepper, a few potatoes and some baking powder.

The entire weight of each kit was not more than twenty-five pounds, for when added to this the weight of a rifle and side-arms and cartridge belts, one across the shoulder the other around the waist, it took a pretty strong man to bear up under the strain of much of a march.

However, as each day progressed the weight became lighter, because "we put the weight inside instead of outside of us," as Nate laughingly remarked.

On this trip there were no blankets taken as it was thought best to "fly light" as it was a War-trail party.

Save for the ammunition, some dried meat, and their rifles and side-arms the two brave men soon had their stores cached.

This was a simple matter.

They dug a hole in the side of the sandy bank with

sticks. Then they buried the stores in this hole and piled it up with stones so that no wild animal could possibly paw down into them.

"Mark the cache by that blasted tree there," said Dave as he pointed to a lightning struck tree near by. "Now then, I take it we had better git up into the woods and see where we can get a little rest. We are going t' have a muss before morning in all probabilities, and there you are."

Nate saw the wisdom of the remark, and after the canoe had been hidden, followed the trapper into the woods for a rest before the night stole upon them.

The forms of the two men had not disappeared in the glade when a man peeped out from behind a tree.

The man's face was painted in wide stripes of red and green—it was the War Paint of the Chipewyan Indians.

There was a cunning leer on the face of the savage. His treacherous, venomous face was eager with his discovery.

"Attack our camp tonight!" the Indian hissed. "We heap be ready! Ugh!"

As he spoke Alsek, the Chipewyan chief, brandished his tomahawk in the direction of the fast vanishing white men.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLAW'S PLOT.

"Have a care, Alsek! If you dare fool me your life must pay the forfeit for your temerity."

Saugeen Sam, the outlaw chief, calmly spoke these words to the discoverer of Nate Shelby and Dave Irving, not two hours later.

As soon as he had discovered the midnight attack planned by the Royal North-West Mounted Policeman, Nate Shelby and the trapper, Dave Irving, the savage had hurried over to Rat Island to tell his chief, Saugeen Sam, of the fated news.

The reception of the news by Sam is told in the opening sentence in this chapter.

The bandit leader did not believe the Indian.

"I no fool," cried Alsek in return to the chieftain's doubts. "I heap see! I know. Ugh!"

Ponce Plassey, who stood near nodded in deep meaning to Sam.

"His story sounds straight, don't it?" queried Plassey.

Sam beckoned to Plassey to move out of ear-shot of the Indian. The latter saw, but remained impassive as his race usually is under stress of suspicion especially.

"What d'ye think of that red chap's story?" asked Sam, when he and Plassey were alone.

"Sounds true to me," Plassey rejoined.

"Does to me also, but I'm leery of them savages. You can't tell when they are telling the truth and when it's a frame-up to put you in the hole."

"I know. In this case it can't be a frame-up."

"Why can't it?"

"That chap got 'his' when Mrs. Irving plugged him in the ribs with her gun, the night we burned up the old hellion's house."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" laughed Sam. "It makes me laugh to think of that night. Say, she did plug Alsek, and between us, I'm dead sorry she didn't kill him. He is a no good Injun, that feller! He'll make trouble fer us, don't ye think, 'fore he gits through. Thet's why I'm 'fraid ter take much stock into him or his story Ponce—them Injuns is frightful deceitful."

Plassey nodded and winked.

"Ef that's so why d'ye keep takin' 'em on and filin' up good white men's places wit' them red truck?" Plassey asked.

This was a direct facer for Saugeen Sam. He knew that many of his band objected to the red element in it—even the half-breeds of white and Indian blood seemed to hate the full blood red-man.

"Now I'll tell ye, Ponce," remarked Sam, after a quick glance at his companion's face to see what he was thinking about. "It's this way! The red-men don't have ter hev the look-in thet the whites does."

"Thet's so," admitted Plassey.

"Now ye take the hold-ups we chaps hev been in th' last month—wall, thar hez been four whites en five Injuns in each. Them four whites hev got moren they ever did outen simal-eer raids. Thet is, I've not let the Injuns in on jest wot we've pulled over an' so I've been enabled ter give the white boys more cash, and the red boys less, an' every one is satisfied-like an' happy, an' the red-men ain't wise a bit. See?"

Plassey "saw."

"I ain't goin' fer ter say thet ye don't knaw yar bizzyness," put in Plassey in a tone of apology, "but I'm one o' them men thet'd rawther git less of a divvy arter we pull anythin' off then ter woick wit them red-men—I tell ye, Sam, w'en it comes ter a show down they're yaller every time. They'll fight all right w'en they's ahead an' they has the best o' ut, but put 'em in a hole whar they ain't sure they has ye outnumbered, an' they ain't no good. They's sly an is liable ter sell out th' gang every minnit. Wall, yar the head uv us an' we hev gotter to take wot ye gives us, but the day is comin' w'en they'll git ye an' all o' us inter trouble."

"Wall, they ain't got me no trouble yit," blazed out Sam.

"I dunno erbout thet! Want we in trouble ernough wit'out this hyar red son of a hoss-thief goin' a firin' outen them bushes an' pottin' ole Miss Irvin'? Say thet was a fool thing fer him ter do!"

Sam's face was white with wrath.

"Yaas," he howled, "it shore was! Th' hoss-thief Injun hez brought them whole troubles a pourin' outen the skies at us. Look hyar, now wot did he kick fer?"

"'Cause Miss Irving shot him up?"

"That's right! Wisht she'd a killed him! Ef if a big man ez Alsek couldn't let that thar wimmin-folk hev her fun with him. Say, Ponce, she wasn't more'n twenty-five feet frum Alsek w'en she shot im' an' say she had a twenty-two caliber gun."

"W-h-a-t?" yelled Ponce. "Haw! Haw! Haw! W'y man, I'd let thet womern shoot all day et me wit' a baby's pistol—a twenty-two caliber—rats, w'y thet Injun ain't got no call ter kick on gettin' one of them twenty-two bullets inter him—says he want in no danger! Thet gun couldn't really hurt a misquiter."

Sam laughed as he drove a host of mosquitoes from around his face, which he kept free from them by using a decoction of tar-oil, pennyroyal and citronella on his countenance.

"'Fraid of mosquitoes," laughed Sam. "Wall they's ernuff hyar on this island ter spile most any man's beauty."

"I wisht I hed the narve ter make that Alsek sit up

an' shoot all the pesky things on the island," remarked Plassey impatiently.

"Thet would keep him some bizzy," said Sam, "an' furder 'twould need a pile uv ammunitern fer thet thar twenty-two cal-e-beer. Say, sport, thar's a lot uv better places then this hyar Rat Island."

"Betcherlife!" swore Ponce. "Say, I'll bet I kin pick a livelier and likelier place fer a home wit' me eyes shet then this—but wot ye goin' ter do—it's getting so thar ain't no place up hyar fer we gun-men!"

"Thet's right! The game ain't what et uster was. They's all seemin' ter git jest nachully a hump on about us fellers—an' ef that story of Alsek is true they've sent one of them 'tarnal Mounted Policemen et us, along wit' Irving.

"Thet's it! I tell yar wot was the ust er a shootin' outer the bushes an' a hittin, Miss Irving? She thrun her torch wen she was hit right inter that thar haymow, but it ketched quick, an' the whole house an' adjacent barn was soon a goin' up in that thar air—why say Sam, ut didn't do no good an' see wot its brought down on us?"

Sam swore lustily.

"Irving calls in the policemen an' him comes over frum Fort Assinniboine, post-haste. Say, Ponce, ef thet story of Alsek's true we hev gotter git them two fellers!"

"Shore! They must be put under thet thar sod soon ez we kin git 'em thar—an' it's unnecessary ter hev it happen. Ef ye wisht ter shoot-up Dave Irving's home en burn et up, ye hez the call ter do it, as yar chief hyar. But ter stand fer that thar Alsek's shootin' up Miss Irvin' 'cause she jest tickled his ribs wit' a leetle baby plaything o' a gun, was foolish policy an' they's lots of us in the gang thet ain' with ye—see?"

Ponce said this in a smooth matter of fact tone but Sam turned deadly white with anger.

His hand stole down toward his gun which swung at his right hip, far forward where he could get it quick.

"Now don't chuck bluffs hyar, Sam," smoothly said Ponce, "I'm jest as good er man as ye wit' the gun, en if ye puts yar hand one quarter of a quarter of an inch toward thet thar weepin youse aim ter draw, I'll fill ye full o' bigger bullets then twenty-twos fer ye can say nuttin'."

The crawling hand of Sam stopped forthwith. He knew the man that spoke was fully as brave as he and if anything more desperate.

Sam came to himself first.

"Wall, I ain't ergoin' ter fight wit' the best man in th' gang under me," Sam said with a sickly smile, "an I jest wisht yer ter knaw thet I lost me head some—say no more about ut, but wot shall we do 'bout this Injun's story?"

"Take it fer wot it's wuth, an' ef he lies, skin him alive," rejoined Ponce, with a smile at the "craw-fish" attitude of his leader. "Anyway ye watches fer them people. If they come over ter Rat Island give them rats some food ter eat—say, they's millions of them rats on this island, ain't they?"

"Shore! Thet's what the island's called Rat Island fer—'cause they ain't nottin' but rats supposed ter be hyar—we bein' rats I suppose."

The two men then rejoined the Chipewyan.

"We've been a talkin' things over an' we hev made up our mind ter take yar story fer wot it's wuth," said Sam to the Indian. "Ef ye is tellin' th' trooth ye gits a big re-ward. Ef ye ain't an' them two white men, Dave Irving and Nate Shelby don't try ter hole us up hyar, as ye said they planned ter do, w'y we'll skin ye alive—an' thet ain't no joke, fer ef you've lied I'm jiggered ef I don't skin ye alive wit' me own fair hants!"

The Indian did not seem to be at all astonished or in the least disturbed by the remark of the robber chief.

He looked up at the rising moon.

"They be here in—ah, thet cum queek. Listen!" Alsek said. in a low tone as he stretched his arm toward the water with a free wide gesture of disdain.

The white men listened.

The regular soft splashes of two paddles wielded in a canoe struck gently upon their ears.

"Git back an' warn the boys et the camp," whispered Saugeen Sam to Ponce Plassey. "Alsek, you worm yourself down to the river and see where the two white men are going to land. I guess, we ain't got them foul this hyar trip, nor nuttin."

The measured dip of the paddles, the rush of the canoe through the water could be plainly heard.

"Let 'em land," hissed Saugeen Sam. "Let 'em land! We wants ter take 'em prisoners ef we kin. They's some rats hyar in human form thet would like ter do biz wit' them fellers. Nate Shelby an Dave Irving."

Saugeen Sam followed his companion, Alsek, down to the water.

The canoe was drawing nearer.

It shot from the brooding night-shadows on the water.

Sam's eyes grew wider and wider.

A woman was seated in the boat, paddling to the island.

"A womern," whispered Sam to Alsek, the Indian. "By hokey ets a womern!"

As the outlaw spoke the woman turned.

It was a white-lack-lustre face that was turned toward the outlaw chief with what seemed to be a red-smudge-like blood on its brow——

"It's the face of the wife of Dave Irving, who you shot from ambush two weeks ago, Alsek!" wailed Saugeen Sam.

Then as if pursued by a regiment of soldiers the two men rushed back toward the outlaw camp.

"It was her ghost!" wailed Sam, the outlaw chief. "It was her ghost!"

The outlaw plot was shivered to its foundation by the fears of the bandit leader that he was haunted by a woman whom he had seen reel and fall as Alsek shot her fourteen days before!

CHAPTER IV.

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS.

"Why are you disturbing the peace of these forests?"

This query put in a soft tone of voice stopped Nate Shelby before he and Dave Irving had gotten a fair half mile into the shades of the forest where they had planned to remain hidden until it was time to steal over to Rat Island to attack the outlaw band.

Nate looked up.

He gasped.

Mounted on a splendid black horse, as ebon as the night itself, sat a young man.

He was dressed in a suit of black velvet which was as ebon in color as the horse he rode.

High, polished, and long black boots rose to the stranger's hips. His revolver belt about his waist was black. The hilts of two large weapons in his holsters were of ebony. His cap was black. It bore a feather that was plucked from a raven, and again kept up the black note of the stranger.

The only white thing about the personage was a pair of white hands which held the thick black reins over the wonderfully large charger's broad fore-shoulders as if they were twice too wide and heavy for the dainty, yet supple figure seated astride the horse.

Nate gazed open-mouthed at the strange figure. Nothing quite so strange had ever been seen fluttering in the wilderness in the young policeman's time.

"Well?" the stranger said after Nate had eyed him for some time. "What is it you want?"

Nate gasped like a fish freshly drawn from the water.

"Who are you?" he asked at length.

"I am The Black Rider," said the figure with a slight laugh.

"The Black Rider?"

"You flatter me by repeating my words—but that is what I said, The Black Rider."

Nate stared again.

"I don't think I ever heard of you before," he said with a positive nod.

"What a fate!" merrily replied the figure on horseback. "Just think of it! This valiant son of Mars, aren't you, for you fight and so did Mars, or he has been libeled somewhat, is named Nate Shelby?"

Nate stared with a wider gaze if anything.

The figure laughed merrily.

"You seem surprised," he said. "What are you surprised at?"

Nate's heels touched the earth once more. He blurted out the truth in his usual matter of fact manner.

"I am surprised at you," he said.

"At me?"

"Assuredly."

"Why at me?"

"I know my North-West very well. I am not much accustomed to seeing a young man dressed in sable costume, mounted on a sable horse in the early part of a sable night, come before me like some spirit from the other world—in fact I would as soon think of seeing the—well you know whom, as you?"

"May be that chap is the devil," said Dave Irving, who had been standing near quite as surprised as was Nate.

There had been no untoward action on the part of the person who called himself The Black Rider, and Nate did not feel warranted in making any attack unless he was attacked; the stranger seemed to know what was going on in Nate's mind for he smiled and waved his white hand right and left.

A massive ring set with a diamond of price, shown and sparkled in the late afternoon sun as the stranger made the motion.

Nate further noticed that the young man wore a great solitare diamond at his throat, and that his cap, where the raven's feather was fastened, bore another diamond.

Nate cudgled his memory, but no where had he ever seen the figure before him.

The great black eyes of the young man, his close-cropped curly black hair, his air of easy assurance, and his decidedly conspicuous horse, and the jet-blackness of its saddle, and of the wearer's clothes would, Nate knew, have stamped himself upon the brain cells if he had ever seen the wonderful figure before.

"No, you don't know me," cried the man who had called himself The Black Rider. "Yet that is not so passing strange! I sometimes don't think I know myself!"

"Have you no other name than the one you have given me—The Black Rider?"

"Oh yes! I have another name. But The Black Rider is sufficient for me in my mission with you tonight."

"You have a mission then?" asked Nate.

"I have," replied The Black Rider. "My mission is not only directed to you but to your companion there, Dave Irving. That is Dave Irving, standing there with his mouth wide open looking as if catching flies in his open mouth was his main occupation in life."

The Rider laughed when the remark caused Dave to shut his mouth with wonderful celerity.

"Now then," added the figure, "if you will keep your eyes from chasing each other across your face, Mr. Nate Shelby, we may get on together!"

This remark made Nate moderate his surprise a trifle. He tried to smooth out the overwhelming shock he felt and after some time the figure continued.

"Now don't please," added The Black Rider, "go to the other extreme. Don't be too *blase*—I don't know which I hate worse in the modern young man, too much knowledge or not enough."

By this time Nate got his tongue back.

"Lookee here, sir," Nate cried, "I just want you to give an account of yourself. It is my duty to ask suspicious characters what they are doing in these woods of ours."

"*Ours*—these woods? Listen to the man! These woods, I would have you know are as much the realm of George of England, as another greenery woods were in the days of Richard of England, when Robin Hood lived! Man, you make me smile. *You* and your boasted law may not know it but you cut no ice in *these* woods! You don't belong! These woods are the property of the night, and of myself The Black Rider!"

A thought shot into Nate's mind. This mad talk was the mouthing of a maniac. The creature before him was crazy!

"Crazy," said The Black Rider seeming to read the thoughts of Nate with amazing promptitude. "Crazy? Not a bit of it, I'm as sane as you or your companion, the trapper there. Can you not see that you are not to attempt to deny my right to roam these woods? Can't you see that I resent your appearance here?"

Nate shook his head hopelessly at Dave.

"What do you think of this game?" helplessly asked Nate. "I'll be ordered out of Alberta territory next!"

"Not by me! Not by me!" cried The Black Rider. "I am not here to tell you to leave my fair woods, but to warn you against a danger you know not of."

"A danger!" cried Nate and Dave almost together.

"Exactly!"

"What danger?" asked Nate.

"Don't you know what danger threatens you?" asked The Black Rider.

"Honestly we do not," replied Nate.

"What mission are you on?"

"What do you know of our mission?"

"Enough to know that your mission alone places you in danger."

"Explain yourself."

"Why should I? Fools do not take advice even after there have been explanations. Therefore, why explain if I am sure that my advice will not be taken, and viewed from your attitude, it seems that you are fools —I shall not waste my advice!"

The Black Rider drew his reins over the neck of his horse.

The magnificent animal, which had been standing as if wrought in marble while his rider was talking, began to bound and carracole as if eager to run unnumbered miles.

Seeing that the figure would flash into the woods a second later, and curious to hear more, Nate raised his hand above his head.

"One moment, pray," he said. "I did not mean to offend you! I feel quite sure that I do not avoid taking advice. I feel sure that if you will wait one moment that I can make you understand that surprise at meeting you here in the woods may be an excuse for my seeming stupidity."

The Black Rider spoke to his steed.

The noble animal again became a horse like one carved in ebony colored marble.

"I will await then, any question you may ask," The Black Rider smiled. "I see you know enough to apologize when you are at fault."

"I do," rejoined Nate. "Now will you mind telling us what danger we are in—my companion and I are anxious to know. We meant not to offend you."

The Black Rider seemed to be pleased with the attitude of Nate and of Dave at this point.

He shook his foot loose from his stirrup which Nate saw now was tipped in black patent leather, like the seat of the saddle and added to the somber note which surrounded The Black Rider.

The Black Rider now sat at his ease.

"You want me to tell you of your danger, do you?" he queried.

"If you don't mind," replied Nate.

"It's simple! You have come here intent upon taking vengeance for a crime that has turned your heads I should think, for you are showing neither brains nor courage in the way you are going at your duties."

This remark angered Dave Irving.

"I would have you know, young sir," he snapped, "that no man can doubt my courage that knows me nor my right to wreak bloody vengeance upon the outlaws that have ruined my home."

The Black Rider listened gravely to Dave.

"Your sorrows have given you the right to speak," said The Black Rider. "But it is a pity that your gray hairs have not taught you the advantage of a moderate tongue in dealing with things you know not of."

A flush of anger came to Dave's face.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "I'm too old to be taken to task by a chit like you—a mere boy in theatrical costume!"

There was a note of menace in the stranger's voice when he spoke again.

"I think, old man, that if I were you I would be careful as to my tongue," said The Black Rider. "I brook not such words! My temper is somewhat hasty and I don't allow impudence from young or old men!"

The Black Rider gave one stare at Dave.

Brave as a lion the old man recognized it. It was the stare of a man who had a shot right behind the look, and who had been here in this same position of upholding his supremacy many times; the look he bore to Dave, seemed to be that of the professional gun-man, and Dave decided quickly that here was a case when discretion was the better part of valor.

"I beg your pardon, young sir," Dave said with a stately grace. "My record is so well known in the North-West that I can apologize without being called a coward!"

The Black Rider was evidently of a generous disposition for he hastened to make amends for his part in the half quarrel.

"I beg your pardon," he cried, "age has rights which youth ought to respect. I also (this was said with a mocking glance at Nate) ought to apologize to our young son of Mars here, for the disrespect I have shown his beloved law—but really I know so little of law and order up here in this neck-o'-the woods that some times I get careless."

Dave and Nate looked at each other and grinned.

The magnificent nerve of this young slip of a man, who sat there so calmly and said extremely impudent things, appealed to the humor of Dave and Nate about the same time.

"I see now," said The Black Rider, "that we shall get on famously! What I wished to tell you is this —don't go to Rat Island as you have planned."

"As we have planned—how do you know what plans we have made?" cried Nate.

"Never mind! Don't go, that is all. The canoe you have hidden so carefully may and it may not bear you to the island."

"Ah," said Nate. "You have some inside information?"

"Quite so! Further let me add that what I am going to say to you in addition must be heeded or you will probably remain here in this vicinity for, well quite some time as I don't know when Angel Gabriel is going to blow that famous horn of his."

"Go on please," said Nate.

"There is not much more to say. When you were planning and plotting to get rid of the outlaws by a secret attack, and thus to overpower them in spite of your being only two men, I happened to ride by along yonder ridge——"

"Yes," cried Nate.

"Nothing—only I saw that you were being watched by an especially fierce looking Indian, whom I happened to know was identified with the outlaw band which Saugeen Sam controls."

"Hum," remarked Nate.

"It just happened to strike me that possibly you did not know that your plot was known to the enemy and that you were probably to be countermined. I then thought I would take a detour around yonder ridge, where there happens to be a trail and reach you as I have done. It seemed to me that you men were too likely men, to be food for worms, hence I am here to warn you. Change your plan of campaign. Don't you see that the outlaws await you on Rat Island to ambush you?"

Nate took a long breath.

The warning of the strange young man had saved the lives of himself and of Dave Irving.

"How can we thank you?" cried Nate. "You have saved our lives by your timely warning!"

"By not thanking me at all. Just consider that my voice was one that spoke to you in the wilderness."

There was a sudden whirl as the black steed under its rider's spur darted away into the woods.

The Black rider disappeared down the long corridors of trees into the forest with a wave of a jeweled hand and a brilliant smile.

"In the name of all that's spooky," cried Dave to Nate, "who is the Black Rider?"

Nate shook his head in a silent negative.

"I don't know," he said, "but I'll wager my head against a lemon that I *will* know."

So saying Nate shouldered his rifle and strode off in the direction the Black Rider had taken followed by Dave Irving, who was equally curious as to the identity of the strange figure.

CHAPTER V.

SMUGGLERS AT WORK.

The Smugglers of Little Slave Lake were busy.

At their headquarters on Rat Island, Saugeen Sam Jasmin and Ponce Plassey the day following the fright the chief, Saugeen Sam, had received when he thought he saw the spirit of Mrs. David Irving, whom Alsek the Indian had shot, landing on the island from a canoe, with other members of the Smugglers outlaw gang were busily engaged in landing the loot of the outlaws from a dozen large canoes, whence it had been freighted from the main-land.

"A good haul this time," gloated Sam, as he winked at Plassey.

"Fine," cried Plassey. "This hyar is ther best we've ever had gi'n us."

"Shore!"

"What's in them packages?"

"Whalebone."

"Whar frum?"

"Arctic Ocean."

"How d'ye git it?"

Sam screwed up his face into a nice knowing expression.

"Offen a whaler thet accerdent'ly went ashore on them rocks off Herschel's Island."

"Uh, uh!"

"Simple as kin be. Boat was reg'ler whaler. It was outen th' harbor an' its pilot seen a light wich he tuk fer the lights o' Herschel's Island."

"Wall?"

"Wall, nuttin 'cept thar want no light whar he thought he seed one and he cums bump inter a rock, and wen he tries ter git offen et, say, he jest was solid like—wall, some of *my* boys, wen the ship was desarted went aboard her, wen the Cap'n and th' crew was a gittin' ashore, an they some how gits this yar whalebone an' thar ye are."

Plassey shook his sead in caution.

"Say, thet's plumb dangeer-us," he remarked. "Suppose thet any of them Mounted Policemun hed got wise ter ye—say, they'd follered ye ter Kingdom cum, but they'd git ye. I know oncet one o' them cops chased a man two thousan' mile over nuttin but a wilderness and brung him back ter Herschel Island an all the chap had done was selling likker ter an Eskimo womern."

Sam, as he heard the words, was all smiles.

"Say, d'ye think I'm that chumpie ter give up me game thet way way?" he asked with scorn.

"Wall?"

"W'y our fellers up thar ahar they engin-ee-red thet wreck, aint no slouches. They's swarmed over thet boat ter give hell a lookin' fer salvage in helpin' save the ship, or its car-goo—an' say, Ponce, they's played it fer keeps, an' they gits onny two thousand er so uv the bone *fer us* the rest they turns over ter the authoritiees an' gits salvage money on thet what theys didn't pinch—Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Hee! Hee! Ho! Ho!" laughed Plassey also.

Then a thought struck him.

"Say, our fellers put them false lights outen them rocks ter git thet whaler ter run in, thinkin' 'twas the safe harbor o' Herschel Island, an' say, the pilot he druv his ship onto them rocks—say, am I right?"

Saugeen Sam made a gesture of silence.

"Now don't ye mix in ter wot ain't none o' yar consarns," he cried. "Them fellers wots allus buttin in most us'ly gits wots due a butter-in—ef ye don't knaw nuttin ye caynt tell nuttin."

Plassey was sure then that the ramifications of the Smugglers was wider than he had supposed. He saw now that there was a bunch of the outlaws in such a remote spot as the whalers of the Arctic Ocean, and his respect for Sam increased a hundred-fold. After all the outlaws had a leader who knew how to plan things remote from the scene of their camp on Rat Island.

Both men watched Alsek, Jellachich, and a half dozen other members of the band come filing up from the lake, where the canoes were dancing and clattering, to where Sam stood at which point he was looking over the loot.

"Thet's bullion from the mines off up in Yukon," said Sam, as he turned up his coat collar to escape the rather raw and biting wind that swept over the scene.

"How much is they thar?"

"Dunno 'zactly. Thar's prob'y ten ter fifteen thousand dollars in thet thar box. Say, them fellers up in Yukon territ'y are up ter snuff! They pulls them sacks o' bullion offen the comp'ny right under the noses uv them fellers thet was a guardin' it—ter say nuttin uv th' hauls they made offen stage coaches they held-up."

Sam laughed gleefully as he made these explanatory remarks and rubbed his head with his grimy paws, in sheer delight.

When a bandit came staggering up under a big bundle of fur peltries the joy of the bandit chief was great.

"Tree thousan' wurt o' furs thar—comin' frum Mackenzie River parts an' frum the Arctic ree-geens—say, boys, thet's the best thet ever! Say, we fellers hev got a haul this time—ef we kin sell the loot ter advantage."

This part of the game mystified Plassey.

He knew something of the inner workings of Saugeen Sam's system. But he had no idea that there was so much to it all. He saw now that to run an outlaw band successfully required just as much ability as to run a successful business.

There was plenty of "hoss sense" in Plassey's head. He began to wonder if Saugeen Sam was not in wrong—the head that could plan the underground syndicate of thieves that stretched from Rat Island in great bands of crime to far into the jumping off place amid

snow and ice of the vast British North America, might do much better in a legitimate business world.

In fact the same old conflict came to the uneducated mind of Plassey that has been facing the outlaws for unnumbered centuries—does crime pay?

Plassey stopped to think just then, and he decided that it did not, but he saw that having become identified with the life of crime in the territory he would have hard work to get rid of it, and then all thoughts of why and wherefore was crushed out of him by a hail from Sam who had been engaged in having all the Smugglers' loot unpacked and spread about on the grass under a fine pine tree that towered high in the air.

"Git over here, Ponce!" yelled Sam. "I wants ter see ye."

Plassey slouched over to his chief.

"I seen a feller I'm expectin' a comin' in er canoe ter the island," said Sam as soon as Plassey reached him. "Git down ter the river an' meet thet feller or some o' our fool boys may plug him one with theyer guns. I wanter hev ye brung thet chap hyar."

"Who is he?"

"Wall, he's a trader thet buys my stuff an by the way ets him thet feeds ye chaps—did ye think thet banditin' was one long merry jest? Say, some feller hez got ter git the grub fer you chaps, an' see thet the stuff ye gits is disposed of—an' ets a sin an' a shame ter think wot I sells stuff fer an wot it really brings ter the feller wot buys it."

"Huh?" cried Plassey.

Here was a new way of looking at things. He saw at once, that while a man might steal a thing of value, and which had a certain selling price in the regular marts of trade, that the thief could not expect to realize one fourth of the marketable value of the stolen commodity.

"Say, Sam," asked Plassey, "wot d'ye git fer—say them furs?"

"Thar's tree tousan wuth thar in them peltries ef they's wuth a cent," replied Sam. "I'm lucky ter git a thousan' fer them—an outen thet I has ter settle wit the boys what pulled 'em over fer me, an ef I gits fer us hyar two hunner dollars, arter all's been settled wit' I'm lucky—course wen we boys pulls off a ting ourselves the divvy is better, but arter all this plunder won't sell, so far ez we are consarned, fer moren ten per cent. o' its real vally."

"Whew! I'd like ter be the feller wot buys—wots he makin?"

"Thet ain't no summer-day picnic at thet. The outsider hez ter run the chanst er th' police a gittin' wise an' runnin' him off ter jail. When he gits his plunder over, say, ef he gits thirty per cent. o' the vally of the stuff he's lucky!"

"Who makes the profit?"

"'The hones' wholesaler' or 'hones' retailer' who buys the stuff fer way down prices an' pertends thet he don't know the stuff is phony—and then ef anytin' happens he don't have ter stan' fer ut, he's the 'innercent victim' wot didn't know the stuff was stolen—and then, Ponce, thars them custom people to beat in gittin' the stuff over the border from Canada ter the Un-ited States w'ich we hev ter do, as they ain't no trader thet will buy stuff thet's stole frum me an' will take it over the border—'fraid of them custom house fellers wot are workin' both sides o' the line. Naw, this game ain't no good any whar."

Plassey ruminated.

"Was it ever any good?"

"Naw! I don't b'leeve thet outlawin' was ever half as good as doin' straight bizziness—ef I kin git outen this game I'm goin' ter, suddent like, en see wots in going back ter Canady and tryin' ter do a lee-git'mut bizziness. They ain't nuttin lef fer me, hyar. Rat Island is gittin' ter be too well known an' now the Mounted Perlice and that trapper, Dave Irving, is arter us, it's th' beginnin' uv th' end, I tinks."

"Aw brace up! Don't git woozy! They ain' no call fer ye to knock our game like wots yar doin'," sympathized Plassey. "It mount be wuss!"

"I'm thinkin' I don't knaw how," rejoined Sam. "Now git a move on ter ye and bring thet chap wots now pretty near shore up hyar."

Fifteen minutes later Plassey with an expression of utter amazement on his face was escorting a slim young man to where Sam, the bandit chief, stood.

The slim young man, who was dressed entirely in black, was puffing a great black cigar as he strode along which he held in his white hand on which sparkled a beautiful diamond.

The figure, slim, yet stately after all, nodded to Sam, the outlaw, and began arranging its fine lace ruffles about the wrist of its plain, rich, black-velvet jacket.

"Hello!" said the figure to the outlaw chief.

"How's The Black Rider?" asked Sam heartily. "Put her thar!"

The huge paw of the outlaw and the delicate white hand of the visitor met in a friendly clasp.

"I'll be jiggered!" said Ponce Plassey, as he watched the meeting of the illy assorted pair.

CHAPTER VI.

NATE SHELBY WONDERS.

Nate Shelby, the young Constable of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, hurried after The Black Rider, followed by the old trapper, Dave Irving.

At the rise of a hill they saw the black attired young man rush off, and could hear where they stood the clatter of his horse as he scaled the steep hill and vanished behind its purple rim.

As if fascinated by the sight of a man climbing a hill on a powerful horse and disappearing over the brow of said hill, Nate stood for several minutes.

Then he swore softly to himself.

His words were echoed by Dave Irving who seemed to be as greatly interested in the strange episode as Nate, and willing to relieve his mind in much the same way.

"What do you think of that black man?" finally Nate remarked.

"You mean the white man in the black clothes, I suppose," rejoined Dave.

"Any old way you want to put it, Dave. What I want to get is your opinion of the fellow."

"My opinion? Oh, he was likely enough. He had on some nice diamonds."

"Not as to looks or diamonds," replied Nate. "What I want to know is what you think of the fellow—what is he doing out here? What's his business?"

"I am not runnin' a business directory out here or any where else," replied the old trapper. "What he is doing isn't any of my concerns and there's one thing about him I like——"

"What's that?"

"He saved my life—and yours, mine being more important to me than yours."

"That's so!"

"Confidentially, he can save my life as much as he chooses! I ain't going to stop him when he has the feelin' that he wants to save my life—and in any other way I don't care a cuss who or what he is."

Having delivered himself of this statement, Dave sat down and lighted his pipe.

Nate felt that the trapper was right.

"Say," said Nate, "I guess you're taking the right view of things. You are quite a fellow for seeing down to the bottom of things, aren't you? It's not for me to pry into a chap's reason for riding a black hoss dressed in that outlandish suit of black clothes, when he has just saved my life, and had to go out of his way to do it at that!"

"That's the way I was looking at it," said Dave. "If I were you, I'd drop pryin' into the private biz of that chap and be thankful he took enough interest in ye to keep ye from gettin' your head split open. As for me, I have no hankerin' to fill a lonely, unmarked grave, don't ye know, after Saugeen Sam has pooh, poohed me over with his big magazine repeater. That's what!"

The remark pleased Nate. He thought that he had never met a man with more good average sound common sense than Dave, the trapper. But there was one thing that he, himself, was interested in; that was, how the trapper and he were going to make good their boast of decimating the ranks of the outlaw smuggling gang.

He saw that the man who called himself The Black Rider, had not forgotten to throw a mystery about himself, and yet somehow or another, Nate, who had the natural detective ability born in him, felt that The Black Rider knew more than he had allowed to appear about the outlaws.

"Did it strike you," said Nate, "that that Black Rider may or may not know more about the gang of smuggling outlaws than we give him credit for?"

"No, it didn't," coolly answered Dave. "But even if he does, what of it? He saved my life and if you want to you can chase about and try to find out more than you know about him—so far's I'm concerned I'm going to stand pat."

"But you see I represent the *law*," remarked Nate.

"The *what?*" questioned Dave.

"The law."

"'Don't make me laugh I have a cracked lip,'" quoted Dave with a smile.

Even Nate had to smile; to prate of the law in a country with only *one* Mounted Policeman covering a thousand square miles and whose "post" usually was twelve or fifteen hundred miles long, did seem a matter for a joke.

"Anyway," said Nate——

He did not get any further.

"Don't let's talk about law out hyar," said the trapper. "It's too much of a joke. I ain't trying to put no law on Saugeen Sam, Nate, even if you are so solemn about your 'duty.' What I'm trying to do is jest naturally to kill the infernal thug. He shot my wife and burned my home and I'm going to git *him* and jest as many more of his gang as I kin—especially that Injun Alsek. Don't law me! It's a weary remark, that!"

Nate saw the force of Dave's feelings. It was just mere blood vengeance that Dave was after; he cared no more for the law side of the argument than if there never had been any law since the world began.

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth;" that was Dave, the trapper's, law, and it had been the law of the wild for centuries; so Nate held his peace. It was not a theme that admitted any argument.

Nate changed the subject.

"Anyway," he said, "we will get the outlaw gang, desperate as it seems to be to attempt it."

"That's the talk!" cried the trapper. "I ain't out on no Sabbath day's stroll, Nate, this trip. I'm out for blood! It's got to wash out some of the things that trapper has put on me. I ain't never seen even the body of my wife. I know from things the gang hev said here and there thet the Injun Alsek shot her out of ambushment, 'cause she shot him in the ribs with her gun, brave old gal, as she was—but I ain't never had even the satisfaction o' seein' her dead body. When you faces that, young man, then you won't listen to no silly talk about 'law!'"

"Didn't you find your wife's body?"

"Find it? I found nothing but a pile of smokin' embers where my house was, and which I had left not ten days before to git about and look at my traps. That's what I found when I got back! Nothing but embers—I suppose those varmints threw my wife's body into the burnin' house arter the Injun shot her. Well, I'll guaran-tee two outlaws for her life before I git through! If you don't want to foller Saugeen Sam's gang to get *my* vengeance, I'll git it alone for I'm bound to git it if I have to wait to the last day of my life t' git it!"

The civilization veneer fell from the trapper as he spoke.

He reverted from a man, who had seen enough of the educated walks of life and could speak well and properly, into an uncouth hound of an old trapper; but a blood-hound now, who could rend and gash the flesh of victims with his fang-like teeth.

Dave Irving, trapper, was mentally stripped for bloody combat.

He thought now in the elementary stage.

He would go and try to tear the outlaw, Saugeen Sam, into inch bits with his bare hands as with a weapon, if no weapon was handy, Nate saw.

Nate down in his savage heart, repressed by the discipline of the semi-military body he had joined, sang aloud.

He, too, had felt the blood-lust, the desire for revenge, and he warmed to the consistent old trapper, who proposed to visit vengeance upon the outlaws who had shot his good wife and burned his home.

"I'm with you," said Nate. "Law or no law we will try conclusions with the outlaws."

The trapper held out his hand.

Nate grasped it.

"You are a man all right," Dave said, "whether you do happen to represent the law or not!"

"Come on then," cried Nate. "Let us see what we can do toward outwitting the outlaws although up to the present time it doesn't seem to me that I have done much except to point out what I would like to do—I've talked more than I have 'made good.'"

"Well, anyway, we know that we stand together in this. We will——"

But before the trapper could say another word a starting sound came to the ears of Nate.

Z-z-z-i-p-p!

An arrow sent whirling by a stalwart arm darted out from a thicket toward the left of where the two men stood.

It cut through the air, and with a choking cry, Dave Irving, the trapper fell to the ground.

For a moment Nate Shelby was stunned by the sudden attack upon the aged trapper.

Then his rifle sounded and its magazine sent a storm of bullets toward the thicket from which the attack had come.

There was a great threshing in these bushes and Nate, whose wits came to him with a rush, picked up the trapper and rushed behind a tree a few feet away.

He saw, as he ran, that an arrow was sticking in the trapper's breast.

The arrow bore a War head!

It was sent by the Indian Alsek, Nate Shelby was positive.

CHAPTER VII.

A DEAL WITH DEATH.

"Wall hyar ye are et last!"

This genial sentence began the conversation between The Black Rider and Saugeen Sam Jasmin, the outlaw leader, Sam, himself, making the above remark.

"Yes," replied The Black Rider, "here I am at last."

"Wall?"

"Well?"

"Are ye doin' any tradin' now er days?"

"As usual—some."

"Want to trade with us?"

"I'm indifferent. Things aren't very good outside. I'm pretty well stocked up, but if you have anything real good, why all right. I might make a deal if things came to me in bargain lots."

Sam's face was wrathy but he was discreet. He did not wish to quarrel with the only man he knew would, just then, be willing to take the goods he felt that he must sell, at any where near a fair valuation.

"What are the things here valued at?" The Black Rider said in an indifferent way. "I see you have a lot of stuff—but you'll have to deliver it smuggled over into the United States, don't you know. I can't take the smuggling risk. I will take the risk of 'fencing' (receiving stolen goods) but that's all."

Sam thought quickly.

"Will ye give me ten thousand dollars fer all thets hyar," he said, "delivered in Chicago C. O. D?"

Without even a glance at the plunder the Black Rider asked for an inventory of it.

He glanced his eye down the list of articles when Sam handed him the inventory.

"That's all right. You ship it as mineral specimens, C. O. D., same old place in Shy, and I'll come over with the cash."

Sam gasped.

Such liberality he felt had a reason behind it. For as a usual thing The Black Rider was a shrewd bargainer.

"I know what you are thinking of," The Black Rider remarked quickly. "Sam I am going to make my last trip this time. I can afford to be generous."

Sam laughed but it was a wry laugh.

"Wot's th' matter?" he said. "W'y are ye goin' ter fly th' coop?"

"Had enough! Game about over."

"Why?"

"Don't you see that every year the game we are playing has been pushed back further and further toward the end of things?"

"Naw! I cain't see wot ye mean."

"Well, it's simple. You were all in the game with me, were you not, for let's see—how long is it we have been dealing together?"

"Several years at least. Oh, ye hev been handlin' our goods fer six year, even befoah we came hyar ter Rat Island."

"Yes. Well, things was going all right until this year—then you chaps put your foot in it."

Sam's face expressed great surprise.

"We puts our foot inter it? Say, wot t'ell! Wot's eatin ye? Hev we done ye in onny way? Ef we has, say, I'll make good and ye kin bet 'tain't my fault! I ain't gotter do a good feller like ye is. Not much!"

The Black Rider shook his head.

"Your dealings with me are all right," The Black Rider rejoined. "You need not feel that is why I'm out of the game."

"Good! Then w'y are ye quittin' us?"

"Your own fault."

This remark by The Black Rider made Sam stare worse than ever.

"Et's beyont me," Sam said. "I kin git no head nor no tail ter ut—hyar ye tells me thet things is O. K. with me and you; then ye tells me I'm ter blame or some of me gang—say, I cayan't get to yar meanin'."

Sam's face was red with his effort to understand.

"Now look here," rejoined The Black Rider. "There's nothing I suppose that your gang has done that can make me blame you much, leastwise, not as much as I might, but between us, you have made it impossible to deal with you any more. I can't deal with you from personal reasons. These are first and only because I can not afford to be known to be dealing with you, Sam. Your reputation isn't the whitest in the North-West, Sam, eh?"

"I allow thet ut taint er—as white ez some er the snow on the top uv them mountains over thyar, but say, beau, remember thet thar snow is thar all the while. Thar's nuttin' but snow thet falls onto et. Now wit' me I hev now en then ter git inter connection wit' some o' ye hones' men—they kinder sullies me whiteness. I suppose that thar fac' hez got erbout hyar. Wall, I'm sorry ef the rippertation I hez is goin' ter hurt yar unsullied honesty."

The Black Rider's lips were wreathed in smiles.

"Good, Sam," The Black Rider said, "I didn't think you had that gift of a 'come back' in you. Now I'm not putting up any bluffs as to my honesty, and I am going to put it all down to one thing and that is I don't like to go to jail. Further association with you will pretty sure land me there."

"I swan I ain't on."

"Well, I will explain. Didn't one of your band shoot the wife of Dave Irving the trapper?"

"Yaas."

"Who did it?"

"Alsek, one of my Chipewyan's."

"Hum! Well, I think you had better get rid of that thug quick."

"Why?"

"Because he's the chap and others of his kind that makes me quit you."

"O-h-h!"

Saugeen Sam saw at last the drift of his friend's woods. The act in shooting Mrs. Irving, was the reason why The Black Rider would make no more trips to Rat Island.

"I swan I kin not see wots all this hollerin' about," said Sam. "I didn't go fer ter shoot up thet ole womern. Et was thet Injun thet potted her outen them bushes. Ef I'd er known he was a goin' ter do it I swar I'd stopped it."

"That's it! You're in the case of poor old Dog Tray who was killed because he was in bad company. I don't know but that you are the victim of hard luck in a way, but after all you brought this thing on yourself by the kind of men you let join your band. If you will fool with poison Indian thugs, you must take what's coming to the thug."

"Wall, I ain' ter blame——"

"Nonsense, Sam! You are all to blame! There isn't a man in the territory but that might excuse your shooting-up Dave Irving's place and setting it on fire if you did it when he was home. You and he had a feud on and he must know that when a man like you gets sore that there's only one outcome and that is a resort to the gun. But in this case, you went to his home when he was away, and held up the house and burned it when there was only a poor feeble old woman there. There isn't a man in the territory that won't jump for his gun to get you after that fool break."

Sam's jaw was slowly dropping with wonder and fear. It was a new line of talk that he was hearing. He didn't like it either.

"Wall," he said, "I'm plumb sorry ef my shootin' up of that thar Irvin' place hez made so mucht hard feelins' agin' me, but then I cain't see ez I was anyways so darned pop'lar in this part uv th' woild——"

"No. You were looked upon as an outlaw but a decent one. Now you're looked upon as an outlaw, but not even one that a decent outlaw should associate with—Sam, you're in wrong!"

Sam had not blushed in forty years, and he was nearly fifty years old. He tried to keep back a trifling wave of color that swept over his crime-stained face.

"Wall, did I git inter trouble fer what thet Injun Alsek did?" he asked.

"That's the crowning trouble. You sure did get in that way up to your neck. It's that action that made all the rest seem so black. Why, didn't you know that there's posses forming wherever there's a white man living to come here to Rat Island to clean you and your gang up?"

A hunted look, but a gleam of hatred and malice, swept over Sam's face.

"Let 'em come!" he shouted. "I kin hold this hyar Islan' agin the woild, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"No question by all that's fighting that you can—but I am not going to be embroiled in your fights. Keep agoing as long as you want to, but when you did not string Alsek, the Chipewyan, up for shooting Mrs. Irving, you ended your chance to do business with me. I'm not going to fight—and already you have brought down the best man in the Royal North-West Mounted Police and it looks to me that it isn't up to me to fight your battles, brought on by your own foolishness. You fight them yourself—I'm only a trader and not a fighter of other men's battles, so, if you don't mind, this trip will be about all for me!"

Sam swore deeply.

"I knawed it w'en I see thet ghost!"

The Black Rider gave Sam a level glance.

"What ghost?" he asked with disdain.

"The ghost of Mrs. Irving—I ain't sed much erbout ut but I hez seen her spirut hyar on this island—she gits hyar in a canoe. Thet devil of an Injun wot shot Mrs. Irvin' he seen et too—he sez, thet he's gotter kill the husban' of thet womern Miss Irving. He's gone ter shoot-up Dave now, ter lay thet ghost o' his wife what the Injun sez will walk this yarth till her husban' cums to her an' the onny way is ter shoot-up Irvin' too."

"You fool!" roared the Black Rider, who turned upon Sam with a face convulsed with passion. "You insensate idiot! Do you mean that you have stood by and *let* that assassin of an Indian *add another crime to the one he has already committed.* You addle-pated idiot——"

"I take no such truck from any man!" shrieked the outlaw as his right hand grasped his revolver. "Draw yer weepin!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE BUSHES.

Nate Shelby was game to his boot-tips!

In less time than it takes to write it, Nate had laid the aged trapper, Dave Irving, down in a sheltered nook, had extracted the arrow from the old man's chest and was off wriggling into the bushes where he had seen and heard mysterious threshings, when he had shot in that direction from his rifle, after the fall of his trapper companion.

There, face downward with a pool of crimson and constantly widening fluid about his head, lay a big buck Indian stone dead.

Nate Shelby had landed one of his rifle shots.

Nate looked closely at the dead form. It was naked to the waist. It was painted in wide streaks of yellow and red about its body to the buckskin trousers it wore, confined at the waist by a wide beaded belt, tipped with dyed porcupine feathers.

"Who is this fellow?" muttered Nate to himself.

He turned over the body with the butt of his rifle.

"Ah!" he said. "Ah!"

The face disclosed was that of Jellachich, the Kogmollock Indian outlaw, well known to Nate.

"I knew this chap well," Nate added to himself, half aloud. "I had him on Mackenzie River for stealing, two years ago—he wiggled out of the charge and jumped the country. So he came here, eh? Joined Saugeen Sam's gang of course. Well! Well!"

There was manifestly nothing to do with a dead man but bury him. So Nate returned to Dave, hoping fearfully that the trapper was not mortally wounded.

He found to his joy that Dave was sitting up, trying to bind up a wound in his breast, and Nate hurried to assist.

He, himself, had done a little first-aid to the injured work before he had rushed over to find the Indian, Jellachich's body.

"Hey!" cried Nate. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to staunch me wounds," the trapper jovially remarked. "What do ye think? I got a deep cut on me breast-bone, and that's all—it was the shock of

that arrow that knocked me down. Say, I thought a ton of brick had fallen on me."

"Hope the arrow head isn't poisoned," anxiously said Nate.

He knew the fashion of the Kogmollock's was to shoot an arrow into a bit of decayed meat.

It meant death when shot later into an enemy's body.

But there was no tell-tale greenish-yellow matter indicating a poisoned arrow to be seen on the arrow-head which Nate examined closely.

"No, I'm sure there's nothing here that means any poison," Nate decided. "Those chaps didn't shoot a poisoned arrow into you Dave."

"No," replied Dave, "they put over a pain-giving one. Say, I'm sore in body and mind. If that wasn't the limit—shooting me at my age with an arrow!"

There was infinite disgust upon the trapper's face. He was so funny that Nate roared with the humor of the situation.

"You seem to see something funny in all this," cried Dave. "If seeing a friend with a hole in his skin is funny—all right!"

Nate promptly apologized.

"I didn't mean it that way," he remarked to Dave. "It was the sight of your disgust at being shot by such a primitive weapon as an arrow. It was lucky for you that an arrow was used."

"Y-e-s, I suppose that's so," grumbled Dave. "If it had been a gun, Dave would not be talking to you now, would he? But say, why didn't they use a gun?"

"That's what's bothering me. They used a bow and arrow because they didn't want to make a noise. It was to be an assassination from ambush, but it had to be accomplished without noise. The fact that they shot only at you indicates that you alone were the one they were after this trip—got any secret enemy Dave?"

Dave shook his head.

"Not that I know of," he said, "but if he was a secret enemy I'd not know of it, you know, but I didn't think up to now that there was a man in the world that would want to git me, 'cept Saugeen Sam. I suppose he wants to get me if he can, but knowing Sam, as I do, I don't think he would use an arrow. He wouldn't care if it was he, or any of his gang wouldn't care if he sent 'em to turn the trick, what noise they made——"

"Then it looks to you as it does to me, that these Indians, for I'm sure that there were two of them, had a reason for not making a noise in their devilish work. They did not propose that you, any way, should pass in your checks with much noise about it—that in my mind indicates that they did not wish some one to know that you had been assassinated. The report of a gun carries far in these wilds."

Dave sat up, now that the two men between them had patched him up pretty well. He was a tough old man, with plenty of resistance in his supple frame. He gave a keen glance at Nate.

"Nate, you suspect that there's one here that those Injuns didn't want to have hear a shot, eh?"

"Yes," replied Nate.

"You mean that chap who called himself The Black Rider?"

"Yes."

"Who do you suppose he is?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Strange that he should be here in time to warn us."

"That's what I think."

"And stranger that he was here at all?"

Nate shrugged his shoulders.

"I still think," he remarked quietly, "that there is some connection between the outlaws and that chap, the Black Rider. I don't know how I'm going to prove it, but I think there will come the time when we will know fully what just now seems an impenetrable mystery."

"If you're on the trail, Nate," rejoined Dave, "it won't be so much of a mystery in a month, as it is now."

The two friends heard at this point a faint noise that came from the bushes where the dead Injun Jellachich lay.

Only their trained woodsmen senses could have heard the noise.

It was faint, this noise; as if something heavy was slowly, carefully being removed by stealth.

"Sounds as if coyotes had got at that Injun's body," snarled Nate as he rushed over to where the dead body of the Indian had been left, followed by Dave who came slowly to the spot as his wound was still painful.

"Here is the bod—well I'll be kicked!" howled Nate, when he reached the spot where he had left the dead man. "There's no dead Injun here!"

Dave hurried as fast as he could to take a peep at the spot.

He rubbed his eyes in sheer amazement.

There was no body to be seen.

"Do dead men git up and walk?" shrieked Dave in alarm.

"Not in modern times," dryly answered Nate.

"But the Injun has disappeared!"

"Very true!"

"Where is the critter?"

Nate's finger pointed to a broad trail on the soft ground.

The trail was about as broad as a heavy man's back would be; here and there could be seen little globules of blood, with here and there a tiny pool of liquid that had run down upon the green leaves that lay thick on the ground, tempest-tossed from the forest.

"Ah!" replied Dave, in answer to Nate's gesture. "Ah!"

Silently Nate followed the trail of blood and hardly had he reached a little valley behind the thicket than something jumped at him like a lightning flash out of the gloomy depths of the forest and with a fierce cry clutched at his throat. Nate grasped the shape and a deadly fight began!

CHAPTER IX.

SAUGEEN SAM IS FOILED.

Saugeen Sam's hand did not get within two inches of his revolver before the hand of The Black Rider clutched Sam's arm.

The Black Rider, with amazing strength for one so frail looking, twisted Sam's arm until he howled for mercy.

The Black Rider with the same twisting motion, jerked Sam's gun from its holster with his right hand.

Then exerting all his strength The Black Rider pushed Sam backward, over his extended leg, and Sam,

bandit chief as he was, measured his length on the ground with stunning force.

The winner of the sharp bout then darted to his canoe, and in the time that Sam took to regain his scattered senses and rise, the gallant young man was far out toward the mainland.

"Ketch thet chap," howled the bandit, who saw that several of his band had seen his ignoble defeat. "Ketch him, I say!"

"Ketch who, eh?" asked Alsek, who had just reached the island and was watching the scene with a twinkling eye.

"Thet Black Rider?" roared Sam indicating the hair-like mark on the lake which by this time was all that was left of the canoe in which the doughty young man of mystery was speeding.

"Waugh! Too far—no use!"

Alsek laughed a little as he spoke. He had no mind to follow the Black Rider. He also had no mind to explain his absence to Saugeen Sam.

"Whar's Jellachich?" roared Sam. "He went away with you, Alsek?"

"No know where, Jellachich gone—no, no know. Ugh!" replied Alsek, which statement was strictly true, as Alsek could not tell the present address of his whilom companion, although in his mind he knew it was not earthly, any longer.

"Whar's the rest o' me band——"

Sam howled no more.

Instead he checked the words on his lips and then rushed to the canoe just vacated by Alsek and soon was driving it through the water at a wonderful rate of speed.

Alsek followed Sam down to the water's edge. He watched him speeding after the Black Rider for some time.

"Waugh!" he said to himself. His impassive Indian face was lighted up by a smile of pleasure.

"Black Rider shoot-up Sam. Good! Sam shoot-up Black Rider. Good! All along Alsek, he win. Waugh!"

With this remark the Indian stolidly walked back to the camp a few hundred feet away, to find it deserted.

There had been only a small number of the band on Rat Island for some time, Alsek knew, and he readily understood that they were off some where on a foray, hence, Alsek saw, that now Sam had left the island he was alone upon it. There was a smile of pleasure in the face of the Indian, when he saw the treasure that had been offered for sale spread before him, where Sam had been trying to get The Black Rider to buy before the quarrel between the two men.

"Ugh!" cried the Indian. "Heap-good medicine! Dam!"

The last remark was in deference to the white man, whom the Indian had heard use this last remark so often and the Indian mind had decided that it was some word to conjure with; so he used it as part of an incantation for the purpose of bringing good luck.

Alsek gravely examined the furs. He knew peltries when he saw them and their values. He selected the best of the peltries and gravely did these up in a pile.

"Go-o-d medicine!" Alsek gurgled.

Next Alsek began to paw over the remainder of the valuables but he stopped suddenly when he heard a long sigh sound near him.

He looked up.

One glance was enough.

The Indian gave a screech that could be heard half a mile and rushed for the shore of the lake. He did not stop for a canoe but flung himself into the water and lustily struck out for the opposite shore leaving his rifle behind, taking no heed of his selection of valuables; just panic stricken and striving with might and main to get to the main-land.

For, as the Indian thief looked up in response to the sigh, he had gazed into the same lack-luster face, and woe-filled eyes of the wife of David Irving, the trapper, that he and Saugeen Sam had seen staring at them from a canoe a few days before, and which had caused Sam to cry "a ghost."

Alsek, however, had only breasted the water for about three quarters of a mile when his mind became calmer.

He remembered that he had left his rifle on the island; and that was a dearer possession to him than his life, almost, for it is hard for an Indian to get possession of a weapon of the value of the one owned by Alsek.

He had secured the gun as part of his share of the looting of a stage coach, and it had belonged to a tourist from England, who never was to tour more for the Indian had shot him, just as he raised this identical weapon to fire it at the attacking hold-up band.

Alsek had "shot first" and naturally the weapon of the dead tourist belonged to the man who held the quickest gun; and the division of the spoils by Saugeen Sam gave the prized weapon to the Indian.

"Gun! No lose! Rather face spirit woman I shot," the bandit said to himself, and so he turned about and hurried back to the island as fast as he could get there.

The Indian swam with a long steady stroke, using the over-hand method, and soon was back in the camp, although dripping wet. This did not bother him any; an Indian is like a wild thing in animal life, anyway, and stands weather conditions better than a white man ever could. Wet or dry it makes no difference to an Indian.

When Alsek got to the camp, he was surprised to see seated by the pile of articles he had just left, the well known form of Saugeen Sam.

In his mad rush Alsek had not seen that Sam had hurried back to camp as fast as he left it vainly pursuing the escaping Black Rider.

"No get Black Rider?" asked Alsek as he came near to Sam.

Sam's face was ugly.

"Naw!" he replied.

"Too much start," consoled the redman.

"Yass. Ef I had me hans' on that thar feller I'd eat 'im alive," replied Sam.

"No eat, eh?" said the Indian.

"Naw! Thet chap gits away this heah time—but you want ter be 'round w'en I gits me meat-hooks inter thet Black Rider. I'll make him hunt his hoss and ride like——" here Sam's voice flowed along into a choice assortment of oaths that he thought fitted the occasion.

His chain of continuous oaths, however, was broken by the Indian.

"Ghost come back," said Alsek.

"Ghost? What ghost?" questioned Sam.

"Ghost of Irving woman. Ugh!"

Sam jumped up, his face white with his grevious anger.

He rushed at the Indian.

His huge hairy paws clutched the Indian by his throat. Sam gave a mighty heave with his entire frame. The Indian sprang up in the air like a bird, and went flying over backward into the water, six feet away, where a tiny arm of the lake made a sort of creek, eight or ten feet deep.

The Indian went into the water like a great whale. He quickly emerged and in one or two strokes was back on the land again, as mad an Indian as ever was on earth.

His anger was not more than that of Sam's.

Alsek rushed at his chief, who started for his gun, but the weapon lay many feet away where The Black Rider had dropped it when the two white men tried conclusions.

Alsek also was weaponless.

His rifle lay behind Sam where he had left it in his rush lakeward to escape the ghost of Mrs. Irving, he remembered.

Neither man seemed to think of their hunting knives, for they did not regard these as weapons.

Alsek, his face in a grimace of hate, started for the chief of his outlaw band only to be met with the same tactics as before.

Alsek found himself flying through the air again, and hurtling into the cool depths of the water in a jiffy.

Cool water cools angry passions quickly.

Alsek emerged a beaten Indian. He was a very wet one also!

His plight caused a great wave of merriment to escape Sam.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" Sam cried. "You will git gay wit' t' boss, will ye? Ye say 'ghost' ter me again, ye therivi' son of a wood bison an' I'll eat ye alive, see?"

This hated threat of Sam's made Alsek shiver all over; for the bandit in a rage seemed to be capable of eating an enemy, either raw or fried!

"Now ye git over thar an' ye throw yar knife ter me," cried Sam. "I ain't goin' ter run no risk o' yar stickin' me in the back—you've made 'nough trouble fer me, by yar habit o' pottin' people out o' th' underbrush, you dirty Chipewyan bushwhacking assassin, ye!"

Alsek gave Sam one sharp, shrewd glance.

He threw his knife over to the outlaw chief.

Sam stooped to get it.

"Here, you infernal outlaw, don't you dare touch that knife! Here you thug of an Indian shove your hands up—higher. Don't you move Sam, or by the eternal I'll pump you full of lead."

These words came in a hiss of menace to the startled ears of the white and the Indian bandit.

"Furies of Hades!" howled Sam, or if he did not use these exact words he used worse. "W-h-a-t do ye mean?"

Sam whipped around.

He found himself looking straight down the muzzle of the very latest pattern of a repeating shot-gun.

Now, no man, bandit or non-bandit, can look into a compressed forged, high pressure steel bore of a shot-gun with a patent hammerless, safety firing pin, without feeling that a shot can travel at mighty speed over the six feet between one and the muzzle of the gun!

One look, so far as Sam was concerned, was enough.

He did not wait to be asked.

He had thrown his hands up the moment his eyes looked into the gun.

"Held-up!" gasped Sam.

Then his brows lowered in a mighty frown. He, the outlaw leader, the gun-man, the terror of the North-West, was being *held-up!*

No question of it!

Here was an unwavering hand sticking the muzzle of an able shot-gun in his face, Sam saw, and at the same time keeping a watchful eye on the unwinking savage Indian, Alsek, so that no hostile action could come from him to defeat the man who stood so at ease watching the movement of each bandit.

It was a scene worthy of a place in high comedy.

A couple of outlaws in their own home were being held up by a masked figure, just as if the figure was that of an outlaw, who was used to the masked garb of the bandit hold-up man.

Sam with a tinge of professional jealousy saw that the stranger with the shot-gun, had the bulge on the situation.

He held the gun on each man so there was no hope of a rush from either thug.

Sam liked this method; it was very professional.

Then the hold-up man held further the domination of secrecy exceedingly well.

His jacket was turned wrong side out.

His face was covered with a red bandanna handkerchief such as Cow-boy, trapper, Indian, or outlaw usually wore.

There were narrow slits in the handkerchief leaving room for eyesight and to breathe.

There was such a wicked stare in the eyes that looked through the slits, that Sam knew that he could not do it better himself.

"Good work!" Sam muttered grudgingly.

It was not often that he, hold-up man and gun-man and outlaw that he was, had the opportunity to watch the work of a fellow criminal with himself as the victim!

"What's that?" hissed the man whose hand clutching the all-covering repeating shot-gun did not tremble in the least.

"I sed thet ye was doin' good work in de way ye helt me up," sulked Sam, but making no move to put down his hands.

"Thank you," replied the stranger with a soft, laugh in his voice. "I hate to shoot a fellow outlaw, but I've got to take no chances with either of you two men."

The speaker, even as he spoke, kicked over the pile of loot in front of the two outlaws until he found a bit of rope.

It was wonderful to see how he tied the hands of Alsek above his head while he still kept his shot-gun trained on the white outlaw.

"I wouldn't er believed ut cud be done ef I haddent seen ut," sneered Sam. "Thet's bettern anythin' I ever pulled off!"

"Thanks again," cried the stranger as he danced over to Sam and tied his enemy's hands also above his head.

The stranger, with a quickness that was surprising, looked over the wealth of the band that was shown in the pile of things left just as they had been laid for the view of the Black Rider.

He selected the best of the peltries, took some of the other articles, but not more than he could easily carry, nodded to Sam and Alsek, and then leaning over to Sam said one word, that made the bandit turn purple.

The stranger next hurried to his canoe, and flashed away like a thing of the dreams that come with Nightmares!

An hour passed!

Then one of the band, who had returned rather unexpectedly, released the chief of the outlaws and the Indian.

The two men, Indian and white, expected to hear the Heavens crack with the explosive language of Sam, their leader.

But Sam seemed to be in a dream.

His face was white, his eyes staring. The word whispered to him by the hold-up stranger seemed to have paralyzed the outlaw's wits.

He knelt down and without a word began looking over the peltries and miscellaneous loot of the outlaws.

Sam saw that a box which contained a great quantity of stolen gold-dust was missing; he well knew that the strange hold-up man had taken it.

"Gone!" whispered Saugeen Sam, the great, strong, notorious outlaw. "Robbed! I've been robbed like a 'tarnal tender-foot in me own outlaw camp!"

Sam burst into bitter tears.

"For the love o' Moses," whispered the bandit who had rescued the captain of the band, whose name was Jimmy the Dip.

"Wh-e-n whi-te m-an c-ry, some o-n-e gits k-i-ll-ed," remarked Alsek. "I skip! Waugh!"

Suiting the action to the word, in true Delsarte method, the politic Indian started for his canoe.

He had not gone ten steps away when Saugeen Sam broke loose, and his wrath was splendid in its intensity.

"I——"

The word froze in the bandit's throat.

Way over from the mainland there echoed the sound of a rifle shot, which came to the bandits seemingly as a message that spelled trouble.

CHAPTER X.

ATTACKED BY A WOLVERENE.

The hands of Nate Shelby closed on the beast that had attacked him.

Although he was scratched and torn painfully in a moment he managed to get a grasp on the shape that was tearing and biting at his neck.

Nate's hands closed over an animal covered with rich thick fur; its short legs had long curved claws upon them, and these claws it was wielding with the utmost ferocity.

The animal was about three feet long, quite round, and emitted as it fought a strong musky odor.

It was this that identified it in the mind of Nate, as a wolverene, the savage member of the bear family, whose ferocity, voracity, and cunning had been in his childhood days the theme of many a story, and which he well knew was a formidable beast when aroused.

The beast was tearing at his throat, and Nate was trying hard to fight it off, for one long cut from its razor-like claws would kill the fighting young man, almost instantaneously.

"It's a wolverene!" shouted Dave, the trapper, as he tried to get a chance to drive his hunting knife into the beast, which had fastened its teeth and claws, in Nate's clothing, and seemed to fit there like a huge animal growth.

"Did you think I thought it was a canary bird?" stuttered Nate. "It was up a tree waiting for us; it jumped down when we got near enough and has got a strangle hold."

These words were not said connectedly. They were said in short gasps. Nate was too busy to talk in sentences.

In spite of the danger from the wolverene Dave had to laugh.

The animal clung like a bat to Nate, and clawed and scratched and screeched as it did so.

Nate fought the beast off manfully, and while bleeding from many tiny wounds, managed to keep the beast from touching a vital spot.

"Hold the animal there—I'll get it now!" cried Dave at length.

He drove his keen knife to its hilt in the neck of the animal, and it soon was dead after pretty well soiling Nate's clothes with its blood.

Nate, as soon as he felt the wolverene stiffening his grasp, flung it from him, and it rolled over and over, until Dave, trapper like, began to skin it.

"It's pelt will sell for something any way," Dave explained. "Better make hay while the sun shines. It's shining now on me while I skin this beast."

"I feel as if I have been through a threshing machine," gasped Nate.

"You look the part. Or better yet, you looked as if you started through a black-berry bush swamp with a jag," replied Dave.

"Confound that wolverene," rejoined Nate. "It will take me a month of Sundays to get cured up."

Dave, who knew what to do under the circumstances, pulled out a needle-case filled with surgeon's needles, lint, bandages, and general things to bind up superficial wounds with and soon he had the young constable undergoing his treatment.

Several cuts had to be sewed up; others were bathed in clear water and bound up because Dave knew that Nate in the clear atmosphere of the far North, where one sleeps outdoors most all the nights of each summer, lives on plain food, and exercises all the time, would be in little danger of blood poisoning; men in the great North-West lived after wounds that would kill a town man.

As a matter of concrete and condensed fact, Nate did not think his wounds really needed dressing; in fact he thought it was a waste of time to take the steps necessary for simple treatment.

"Aw, what's the use of all this fussing," said Nate. "I am not hurt any and——

"Shet up," replied Dave. "It isn't the fact that your hurts amount to much, but a half dozen of these scratches I see would leave a nasty scar if they were not sewed up—some of them will leave scars but they will be pretty decent scars after I have sewed you up."

"Thank you. Are you a Household Pet sewing machine? Or are you a Sewer Improved?" snapped Nate. "You appear to be 'the boss sewer of the North-West' but I'll tell you your seams aren't sewed straight!"

As Nate spoke he pointed to a zig-zag cut on his

forearm, which the trapper had sewed up, and which was not a neat sample of excellent sewing.

"You make your stitches look like a newly laid rail-fence," said Nate as he shut one eye and looked with a squint along his arm.

"Don't make a fool of yourself by such uncalled for remarks," replied Dave. "I sew my 'seams', as you call 'em, that way on your account—you hate the monotony of plain, careful sewing and like the wide-brush effect effected by white-wash artists."

Nate winked. In fact, he also laughed.

"Why do you suppose that wolverene attacked me?" Nate asked.

"Because you are young an' tempting. No self-respecting wolverene would attack me. I'm old and stringy, and no mount of labor in the way of mastication would make me anything else but an old tough trapper. You are different."

"Shut up! I don't know why the animal attacked me. Wolverenes don't attack as a usual thing. I'm going to investigate that tree."

"You mean the tree the wolverene jumped out at you from?"

"No I mean that tall maple over there about seven miles behind you."

"Don't get gay! Go ahead with your investigations. I ain't curious—especially when a man comes and sez 'there's a dead Injun' in the bushes; then he sez 'naw there ain't no dead Injun in the bushes, come on'—and when I 'come on', pop, out jumps a beast who attempts to chaw you up and if I hadn't got busy with my knife would have done so in a hurry."

"Well I fancy that you will think me crazy but I can't help thinking that the disappearance of the dead Indian, and the attack of the wolverene had some connection."

Dave shook his head sadly.

"Poor youg man," he said, "and there's not a crazy-house in fourteen hundred miles!"

Slightly nettled in spite of his smiling face, Nate marched directly at the tree in the midst of the thicket from which he had been attacked by the wolverene.

A faint bleating sort of a cry came to him—no, it was more like the faint snarl of a bear, and Nate, who knew animals well, knew quickly that the sound came from the tree.

"Cub wolverenes. Oh, I see," he said.

Dave tilted his cap on one side and smiled sheepishly.

"I'm on," Dave said. "Wolverenes live in natural cavern-like holes in the ground and bring up their young there. They don't live up in trees. Nor do they attack man like that animal did you, except in what it thought was defense of its young. Wolverenes live on young foxes, if it can get them, and don't chase foxes up trees—that animal and its young was put there so that when we came by it would jump us. Why a rat would fight for its young! A wolverene is a sandy little beast and while there's been a lot of nature-faking about it, you let me hand it to you that a man had better not try to disturb its young."

Nate was inclined to be sentimental right there. But when he looked over to the dead wolverene, now skinned of its fur; and saw its pelt neatly squared and packed in the kit-bag the old trapper carried on his back, the humor of the situation struck him and he laughed until the woods rang.

"Yes," Nate said. "The fact is that the dead body of Jellachich has been dragged away. Whoever did it wanted time and they happened to come across a colony of young wolverenes, picked them up, shoved them up that tree, knowing that old Mrs. Wolverene would come home soon, miss her children and go hunting for them. This chap figured that by this time we would be hot on the trail and planned this diversion for us—well it diverted us, all right!"

Dave looked convinced.

"Your on," he said. "You've just about got to take it down your throat that you were the most diverting spectacle I ever saw when that wolverene jumped onto you—and you can bet also that no white brain put up that bit of cunning. It was an Injun jumped that plan. It was a fine game and it sartin' diverted all right."

"Come on," rejoined Nate.

"You said that when the wolverene stopped ye—I'll follow all right but *entre nous*, as they seem to say in the books now and then, if you begin with wolverenes and grow bigger as we go 'followin on' that there will be a great polar bear on to us next."

"Oh, there's a lot of wild animals out here that can make our progress a triumphal one of slaughter, besides polar bears, and besides we aren't far enough North for those gentry. Injuns is the worst varmits we are liable to meet——"

"How about outlaws?"

"W-el-l," said Nate. "There's outlaws enough about us. It seems to me that we have done enough plotting to do three hundred bands of bandits but it also and likewise seems to me that we don't do anything but plot."

"Well, some time we will put a plot over," replied Dave. "We will get then into the centre of the game."

"Or some one with a rifle will get a dead centre on us, eh?"

"If they land we won't have to plot any more."

"That's right!"

Nate and Dave had all this while been "following on" along the wide trail where the veriest child could see some heavy body had been dragged.

"We are getting nearer," cried Nate at length, as he pointed to the tracks. "See, how fresh they are?"

Ten paces up a hill and Nate stopped with a cry, while his rifle like a flash went up and trained itself on a man, who stood over the dead body of the Indian Jellachich.

"Don't shoot," cried the man, with both hands over his head in the form of a human "Y", which means from one end of the world to the other in the sign language of all the savage tribes—"Friendship!"

"Wait a second before you kill that fellow," chipped in Dave, the Trapper briskly. "Now you, stranger, who are you? Speak up quick or you're a dead man!"

CHAPTER XI.

A PLOT THAT "CAME OVER!"

The human "Y" was grinning from ear to ear.

The gun Nate Shelby carried began to waver a little.

There is something infectious in a grin that comes to one from another face in the shadow of the North-West forest.

Any face save one's own or one's companion is welcome; sometimes the horrible monotony of loneliness makes even an enemy's face look welcome.

Friend or foe in this case Nate Shelby amiably grinnned back at the grinning stranger—was it a stranger—Nate roared this time.

The man making the "Y" and grinning so amiably was the Black Rider.

"Here's that Black Rider again," cried Dave in an undertone. "Pull down your gun! I can do this slim-jim with one hand tied behind my back and the other in my pocket."

Seeing Nate lower his gun the Black Rider approached.

"Howdy," said the Black Rider amiably.

"Howdy," repeated Nate, while Dave walked over to see the dead Indian's body leaving Nate and the Black Rider alone.

"Far from camp aren't ye?" asked the Black Rider of Nate.

"Not so very far. How comes it that you are here?"

"Me? Oh, I came on horseback. That's my horse back there—you can see him from here."

"Oh?"

"Whose Injun name belongs to that stiff there, your friend Dave, the Trapper is looking at?"

"Don't you know?"

"I know? How?"

"You seem to be interested in the body?"

"Not I."

"When we first sighted you were standing over it."

"Yes that's true. I saw a lot of buzzards sailing down the wind and I know that buzzards blow down after there's been a kill of some kind."

"Ah."

"Exactly."

"Proceed please."

"That is what I did."

"Did what?"

"Proceed."

"I see."

"That's clever of you. I proceeded along until at length I raised the hill over there. I saw how the buzzards were congregating about something in the hollow."

"Ho! Ho!"

"I dismounted. I tied my horse over there and came down to the buzzard covered point——"

"To find an Injun. Deader than a smelt but still an Injun. Then you hailed me at the butt end of your infernal disturbing rifle—and I put up the peace sign, and there you are. My story is all told, you can put in the chapter heads and the sub-heads as you will any time."

The Black Rider took out a heavily jeweled cigarette case, extracted a snow white cube, shut up the case, took out a gem set match-box struck a match and whiffed away his cares as if nothing had happened.

"I don't mean to be impolite," the Black Rider said, "but I dote on cigarettes and there's no monopoly as yet that I know of has started the Uniform Cigarette Company stores up here. If I get out of cigarettes I can't replenish my stock, so pray kind sir, don't feel that I am impolite in not offering you whiffs from my case. I dote on cigarettes, don't you know!"

Nate's eyes widened in sheer surprise at the young man, who still garbed in black was whiffing away, as if his life depended upon it, while he told a grewsome story that was punctuated by the swirling buzzards about the head of the dead Indian Jellachich.

Nate who had lived much alone in the far fastness of the woods took death somewhat seriously; a dead man red or white to him partook of the majesty of he who had solved the mystery of the beyond!

To the Black Rider, Nate saw, the shadow of death that was evidenced by the dead Indian, Jellachich, meant nothing; it was the divergent view point that was all.

"You are fond of cigarettes," asked Nate sadly in need of something to make talk with.

"Oh, indeed, as I have often said, I dote on them," replied the Black Rider. "Do you want the name of my favorite brand?"

Nate's amazed look sent the Rider off into a gale of laughter.

"You see I have recommended to my erstwhile good friend, Saugeen Sam and his band, my favorite brand. I assure you Sam and all his fellow bandits now smoke no other kind."

Nate's puzzled face seemed to amuse the Black Rider greatly.

"Do you mean to tell me that you know Sam, the outlaw?"

"Yes."

"You know him very well?"

"Intimately. In fact I've known him for a great many years."

"Do you mean that you have had dealings with him?"

"Certainly. Intimate ones."

"What?"

"Did I not speak plainly? I said that I had had intimate dealings with Saugeen Sam, the leader of a band of outlaws who at the present time are in *rendezvous* on Rat Island."

"They are eh?" put in Dave. "I tell ye, Nate, we have got to stop these bandits this trip—the idea of *rendezvousin'* about our territory—they ought to be ashamed. Ain't there some law that we can arrest 'em under for *rendezvouing?*"

Nate managed to keep his face from cracking but the Black Rider did not appear to hear Dave at all.

"Oh yes," the Black Rider said, "I've known Sam for probably five or six years—may be longer—and I've been disposing of all his stuff for him over in the United States."

"W-h-a-t?" said Nate. "Man, are you crazy?"

"Not a bit of it. You see, I have been in the habit of coming up here once in awhile and appraising Sam's stuff. Then I'd buy what he had—er accumulated during the time I was out of the territory."

"Oh. Then you acted as fence to Sam's bandits?"

"Y-e-s. I suppose that is what the police would call it, or 'dealing in stolen goods' or something of that sort—yes, I suppose it *is* an illegal business that I am in, but it's quite lucrative—indeed yes, it is. I think by and large I have made quite a good deal of money out of Sam and his gang."

The expression on the face of Dave the Trapper, would have made any artist's fortune if he could have transferred it to canvass.

Nate's eyes were swelling like a bulb in the April ground. He was simply stunned by the confession that was being made to him by the Black Rider.

"See here," Nate blurted out. "You are the most cheerful idiot I ever met. You make me laugh. Don't you know that I am Constable in the Royal North-West Mounted Police and it is my duty to arrest you?"

"Gracious what a long title you carry, don't you? You remind me of a very small dog with a very long tail—not that I mean to belittle you personally but it

seems to me that you carry a pretty long title for the size of your force here displayed."

Dave grinned.

This has been a general feeling all over the North-West that the Mounted Police was a fine body of men but that there wasn't enough of the force to go around.

Nate could appreciate a kindly joke even if it was against himself.

"I guess I am spread rather thin here," he cried. "I'm the only man of my force here this side of Fort Assinniboine and that's a good many miles off. But while I'm spread pretty thin I think there's enough of me to arrest you, especially, as I am pretty nearly as big again as you and besides my side partner here is with me in anything I do."

Dave put in a very decided affirmative nod.

"You bet I'm with ye," he smiled.

"How very poetic," airly replied the Black Rider. "But what are you going to arrest me for?"

"Buying stolen goods of the outlaw gang led by the famous bandit Saugeen Sam Jasmin, and *smuggling* the same over into the United States of America."

"Good gracious! How perfectly dreadful to do all that. Of course you know that in British North America a libel uttered in the presence of a third person is slander *per se*. I might surprise you by a suit for slander if you arrest me."

"Man, are you crazy? Didn't you just now confess that you *smuggled* stolen goods out of this territory, and over to the United States where you sold the said goods."

"Never said such a thing in my life."

"Never said such—say, Dave, you heard him say so, didn't you?"

"Of course. He's jest lyin'."

"Well, I say I never confessed such a crime as you charge me with. Now then how are you going to prove the crime on me?"

Nate saw the point.

He could not prove any criminal action on the part of The Black Rider that would stand in any court of law.

"You can distort what I said to you into a confession," the Black Rider remarked calmly, "but no one would believe you if you did. I would simply deny that I had confessed—how are you going to prove that I have?"

"By the testimony of myself and Dave the Trapper."

"Pretty slim evidence to go to a jury on," answered The Black Rider. "Oh, very well. If you wish to arrest me go on but I doubt whether you can make it stick."

Nate knew that he heard the truth from the Black Rider's lips.

But before he took action finally he decided to talk with Dave whose horse sense he knew could be relied upon.

Accordingly he drew Dave to one side.

"What did you think of this chap?" Nate asked.

"You mean the Black Rider?" said Dave.

"Yes."

"He is crooked all right."

"No question of that."

"He knows Sam, the outlaw."

"Is without doubt in cahoots with him."

"Looks that way."

"Probably his story that he is a fence for *The Smugglers of Little Slave Lake* is true."

"Little question of that."

"That's what I think."

"So do I."

"But what we think doesn't help much."

"No it doesn't help a great deal."

"There's not much possibility of our convicting this chap of being a fence, or a *smuggler* if we tried."

"Not a chance in the world."

The two men thought awhile but came to no possible solution of their troubles.

Each phase of the Black Rider's peculiar story was gone into and was weighed carefully.

But there was no solution possible to it the two men saw.

If Black Rider told the truth, the evidence lay in Chicago, where the goods were smuggled. If Sam, the outlaw, went before a jury and tried to swear that the Black Rider was a smuggler it would do no good. There would be grave doubts in any court as to believing much that the outlaw said.

"Don't seem as if I had a leg to stand on in making an arrest," said Nate after long deliberation.

"That's my view of it."

"Guess I won't make an arrest."

"I wouldn't if I were you. But what I would do would be this—if I could, I would try and find why the Black Rider is here."

"That might be a good idea. He at least might be trapped into making some kind of a statement that would get us nearer the outlaw gang. We are taking an awful long while to get some where and we aren't doing much of anything but getting into some kind of a pickle day by day; but we are not getting into touch with the outlaws."

So Nate turned toward the Black Rider.

He started in some amazement.

The Black Rider had gone fast to sleep. The smoke from a cigarette was still curling up from the sleeping man's fingers showing that he had not passed slumber long.

"Shall I wake this cool individual up?" asked Dave.

"I think I would."

So Dave went and lightly touched the sleeper on his forehead.

The Black Rider was up in a moment.

"Ah," he said carelessly. "I had fine sleep."

Then he yawned!

Dave and Nate exchanged glances. They could not help admiring the careless abandon of the young man.

"I fancy that you win," said Nate with a smile. "There doesn't seem to be the slightest chance for me to fasten any confession on you if I made an arrest of your person. So, if you don't mind, we will call it a draw."

"How good of you. I like the man who admits his defeat so gracefully."

"Thank you," cried Nate with his charming smile.

"My, what a polite bunch," said Dave. "Hereafter when I am going to kill a lynx I shall take off my high hat, take an easy position so that my dress-trousers will not crease and say, 'Mr. Lynx permit me to kill you.' And Mr. Lynx will reply 'Oh don't mention it.' Then I will shoot and the animal will be killed. It will have been shot according to the new social code you two gents have just promulgated."

"Is it in the new social code to bury that Indian over there?" asked the Black Rider.

"Bury an *Injun bandit* me? Not so that you could notice it!" said the trapper.

"Then" replied The Black Rider, "I'm going to show you that if you can not arrest me you can arrest Sam the outlaw."

Nate turned red, and then white. His emotions showed quickly, for the arrest of the outlaw was something that lay near his heart. He had tried so hard to effect the arrest and had been baffled so often that hope of accomplishment was not thoroughly impressed in his breast. He had been tasting the bitterness of defeat in advance.

"If you aid in the arrest of Saugeen Sam, the outlaw," said Nate slowly, "there will be a heavy reward awaiting you for the gallant deed."

"Don't mention it," lightly answered The Black Rider. "I am not working for rewards, Nate Shelby, for the only reward I ask for is that of seeing Sam arrested. He and I have a personal misunderstanding in our hands, and feeling thus, while I am willing to aid you in trapping Sam, I am not going to aid you in getting the reward for the reward—the bagging of Sam, is enough for me."

Nate saw the force of the words and said nothing. How far a man's desire for revenge would carry him he well knew. He knew it would carry further than any reward would stretch.

"I accept your aid," Nate said. "What do you advise?"

"You give me your word of honor as a man," said The Black Rider, "that you will ask no questions of me, but will let me put up a plot that will 'come over.'"

Nate hesitated. He hated to pledge his word, like most men who mean to keep their word.

The Black Rider saw the hesitation.

"You see your plots have 'come over' so well, that any way I might not do much worse—and I am willing to say that nothing in my plan in any way will effect your standing as a 'Constable of the Royal North-West Mounted Police' (whew, isn't that a title to jar you?)" mocked The Black Rider.

Nate hesitated no longer.

"I agree under that promise to abide by your plan, ask no questions, and to assist you all we can," Nate said.

"Make that agreement read 'me too,'" cried Dave.

The Black Rider nodded.

He pulled a tiny silver whistle out of his pocket and gave one long shrill blast.

As if the whistle had called them into active life six splendid black horses came plunging from the forest.

Each horse bore on its back a man.

They were all dressed in jet black. They were reproductions of the form of The Black Rider standing by the side of Nate.

As they charged forward a few rods, and then stopped, their commander grasped Nate Shelby's gun.

He fired the piece in the air.

Its sullen, rumbling note boomed out and sent its echo flying over space to Rat Island.

It was this gun-shot that spelled trouble when Saugeen Sam, the outlaw, heard it on the island home of the bandit gang.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH WARNING.

The shot startled Saugeen Sam from his feeling of wrath, and also suspended the oaths that trembled on his lips.

"What's that?" he asked in affright of Alsek.

"Dunno," replied the Chipewyan.

"Guns don't go off of theirselves, yer fool, nor do guns walk thar through them woods," shrieked Saugeen Sam.

The stolid shrug of the Indian was all that Alsek gave. He knew that his bandit fellow-member of the gang, Jellachich, would not come back anyway and he had every reason to doubt that the missing Kogmollock would rise up to dispute him; and it was not wise to tell all one knows.

So Alsek merely shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"Whar's Jellachich?" roared Sam. "Whar's thet therive son of a wood-bison, the Kogmollock — has enny o' ye fellers seen him?"

Alsek gave his stolid shrug again.

The only other member of the outlaw band on the island then, Jimmy The Dip, also shrugged his shoulders in imitation of the Chipewyan.

The lack of answer made Sam extremely angry.

"Who saw the Kogmollock last?" he demanded in a threatening tone.

"I," replied Alsek, fearing that some member of the bandit gang now on a cattle stealing expedition might come soon and state that he had been seen last going ashore with the missing man. "I go 'shore wit' Kogmollock."

"Where did he go when you went ashore ye red devil?" queried Sam suspiciously.

"I no know," replied Alsek. "He say, 'Me go kill-deer.' He go, that all. Ugh!"

"Didn't he come back?"

"Now?"

"Did ye hearn tell o' him arter he went deer-killin'?"

"No."

"Did you see him?" asked Sam of Jimmy The Dip.

"No. I saw him go ashore with Alsek—that was all."

"Then he did not fire thet shot," shouted Sam. "Naw, I'm sure he didn't. Thet came from a rifle, an Jellachich had nuttin but er re-volver an' a bow an' some arrers w'en he left this hyar camp."

"Waugh!" cried Alsek just then as he pointed to a rapidly advancing canoe.

Sam's face expressed great surprise, as well it might, when the canoe had touched the island for in it was the biggest negro that his eyes had ever beheld.

The strange figure calmly left the canoe.

It was dressed in the same tight black suit of clothing that Sam knew so well as the garb of The Black Rider.

The suit together with the coal-black skin of the colored man made the note of deep blackness in his costume even more startling than when the friend for a time of the outlaw wore the same sable costume.

The only change in the garb from that habitually known to be the costume of The Black Rider upon his periodic trips to Sam's camp, was that the colored man wore a turban of fiery red silk. The turban was

confined at its center by a wonderful great ruby. The stone must have been worth several thousand dollars.

The colored man held in his hand a curiously curved sort of a scimitar.

It's square point glistened in the afternoon sun.

The jeweled hilt of the scimitar bore gems of value.

They shone above the black hand that grasped the hilt, and between the man's fingers in absorbing waves of color.

Sam gazed open-mouthed at this apparition.

"Who are ye?" he thundered at length. "What d'ye do hyar on me island wit' out invertation?"

The negro did not reply.

Instead he swung the point of his scimitar toward Sam.

Sam grasped his gun at his side.

But he did not draw when he saw that the scimitar bore a note on its point.

"For me?" asked Sam of the negro, indicating the note.

The negro bowed in affirmation.

Sam took the note gingerly. He started to open it and as he did so the negro sheathed his scimitar in a jeweled sheath at his left side, and folding his arms, with stately steps walked to his canoe, which was decked in flowers, and was swathed in a maroon velvet canopy over its sides and interior.

With a paddle entwined in flowers the tremendous figure swept his tiny craft with ease toward the mainland, and before the astonished bandits could wink, had disappeared into the line that marked where sky and water seemed to meet.

"Waugh!" muttered Alsek.

"What and whar did that big nigger come from?" whispered Jimmy The Dip.

Saugeen Sam said nothing.

His face was a mixture of astonishment and fear. He was staring with strained eyes at a bit of white paper.

Roughly drawn on the paper was the figure of a man hanging to a rude gallows, made by placing a bit of wood on two upright rough-hewn tree supports.

The note bore these words—

"*The Death Warning.*"

Sam looked long at the paper. He showed it to Alsek and Jimmy The Dip.

"What d'ye think it means?" asked Jimmy in an awe-struck tone.

"Dunno," said Sam.

"Any writing on talk-paper on back?" inquired Alsek with the cunning of the red-man wanting to see all sides of a proposition, while the white man stopped to puzzle over one side.

Alsek awaited an answer from Sam, who had turned the paper over.

The paper on its reverse side said—

"*From The Black Rider.*"

"Waugh!" said the Indian with great meaning in the word he used.

"This has me locoed," shouted Jimmy The Dip.

As for Saugeen Sam he said nothing for a long time.

He knew The Black Rider.

He knew what a warning of that kind meant to the man who received it.

Sam finally came back to this earth.

He looked around the quiet scenery of Rat Island. He looked out over the quiet waters where the gigantic negro had disappeared. Then he spoke.

"Any o' ye chaps heard anythin' from de boys?" he asked in a surly tone.

"Naw," replied Jimmy The Dip.

Alsek shook his head.

"They muss be erbout ter Fort Assinniboine, eh?" Sam asked. "They was ergoin ter hol-up th' Fort coach w'en it gits thar from down Fort Churchill way, eh?"

"Yass," replied Jimmy The Dip. "They was. They sed ter me 'fore theys started thet they was a goin' as far as Fort Assinniboine. Thet's a long ways frum hyar an they ain' no hope frum them. Ef this hyar's a death warning we haster face it ourselves, we three, fer they aint no use er hopin' thet the rest o' the gang will git back. They ain't got ter Assinniboine ter say nuttin' er comin' back jest yit—we fellers hez got ter fite this hyar stunt out tergetter. See?"

All saw.

"I no like," said Alsek. "The Black Rider he all 'lone when we see um last bet he may git over t' Nate Shelby. He b-a-d ma-n! He po-li-ce-man b-a-d! Waugh!"

This expression drew a nod of understanding from Jimmy The Dip.

"If them three fellers, The Black Rider, Dave The Trapper and Nate Shelby the Mounted Cop hez joint for-cees, we tree fellers hez got th' fight o' our lives on to us," remarked Jimmy The Dip.

"I'm afraid boys that we are trapped," said Saugeen Sam. "I don't like the outlook a bit. Them chaps hez got tergether all right. They ain't a fintin' me alone. Them fellers Nate Shelby an' Dave Irvin' hev been back ter back fer me ever since you, Alsek, shot Miss Irvin'—you dirty red-thug, ef I didn't need ye I'd hev ye strung up fer that fool shootin'."

A baleful light showed itself just for a second in Alsek's eyes, just as a roll of thick smoke hovering over a grand prairie fire breaks away to allow a wide flare of fire to sweep up to be smothered in a moment by the leaping, soaring smoke.

"I get hunk!" sneered the Indian.

"Yes," dryly and a bit sadly said Saugeen Sam. "You got hunk, but you have probably got your private revenge, but sacrificed us all ter thet thar Dave Irvin' fer he isn't a man ter forget *The Trapper's Vengeance.*"

"If I had Ponce Plassey here," sneered Saugeen Sam, "you bet I would hev a game wit' them thar fightin' men thet send me such messages as these. I'd make it a death warnin' fer them like thunder!"

"Who speaks o' Ponce Plassey—say, ye fellers seem ter be plumb locoed an' air a settin' 'round hyar like a lotter coyotes," cried a familiar voice.

It was that of Ponce Plassey.

"Hurrah!" yelled Jimmy The Dip.

"Ugh!" grunted Alsek.

There was content and joy in the face of Saugeen Sam when he saw his trusted friend and companion back again.

"I'll fight the fiends of the lower woild," Sam yelled. "Wit' dis bunch an' de gang I'm goin' ter face fitin' wit' us—say, podners I'm able ter stan' up again anythin' dat Nate Shelby kin stack me up against."

"We are wit' ye!" yelled Plassey. "Let's git a move on an' go an' shoot up them fellers."

With a fierce hurrah, the four men rushed to their canoes, and started from Rat Island bound on their

errand of "shooting-up," Nate Shelby, and his awaiting companions.

There was going to be a fight, that was sure!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "FRAME UP."

"Well, it looks to me as if the 'frame up,' was ready."

The Black Rider said this to Nate Shelby, at this point, after an hour of endeavor had "fixed things" for the expected visitors in the lawless Sam Saugeen outlaw band.

"Things are ready," said Nate in surprise. "What do you mean?"

He had been sent as an outpost to climb the tallest tree he could find for the purpose of looking over toward Rat Island and thus be enabled to give warning of the leaving of the island by any of Sam's gang.

Nate, therefore, had seen nothing of the work of "framing up" the expected meeting with the outlaws.

As he spoke he looked about and then gave a cry of admiration.

"Great! Great!" he cried.

The scene was a strange one.

In the center of a sort of cleared place in the forest shone several nice white canvas tents.

What seemed to be men were grouped around them, apparently playing cards.

But Nate was near enough to see that some clothes on sticks of wood with masks for faces, really made up the card-players.

But he could see that a few hundred feet off the casual observer would see that it was merely a party of four or five men playing cards and enjoying a social hour in camp.

From the tents, three in number, a broad trail lay, which he could see had been made with a great deal of labor.

Nate "twigged" in a moment.

"Trail goes to lake bank, of course?" he asked.

The Black Rider, who was alone, was smoking the usual cigarette that was as much his companion as his clothing.

He nodded.

Then he gave a sweeping wave with his hand in a circle.

"My brother Black Riders are ambushed around us. I figure that there will be a sly beating forward of Sam and his gang. They are brave enough and they don't propose to run into anything that they haven't looked at in advance," The Black Rider said.

"Well?"

"I flatter myself that the kind of scout that Saugeen Sam will send ahead of him, will gloat when he sees those tents. If that isn't a rich party of amateur fur-trappers, and will game hunters sitting around in front of their tents playing cards then I'm a Dutchman!"

"I understand."

"Of course you do! That gang there looks like fine picking for the outlaws. Say, you know when any of those 'hunting parties' come out here from Lord only knows where in the settled countries, they are worth picking. They have everything new in guns, revolvers, tents, why, we wouldn't have half the newest things in sportsmen's goods that we see up here if—never mind the rest. What do you think of my frame up?"

One comprehensive look satisfied Nate.

"Greatest ever," he remarked. "No one knows the habits of the amateur sportsman, would not but swear that the trail there was laid out by a colony of those chaps. They come up here and they lay a trail every where that looks as if it was made by a regiment."

The Black Rider grinned.

"I see you know them," he said. "Yep, I am with you. I hate anything of the amateur class from an amateur actress to an amateur sportsman—all keep an honest professional out of a good job. We know what it means up here. There's not a wild animal that wouldn't hunt its hole for ever when it hears the noise of these amateurs. They scare all the game off and are about the worst nuisance you could possibly fancy."

Nate laughed.

"You've got them fixed out to the life here—but where did you get your tents and your clothes?"

"Wasn't it nominated in the bond, set sealed and delivered that you were not going to ask any more questions?"

"It was."

"Then don't ask 'em."

"I won't. I will tell you some news if you want me to."

"What is the news?"

"The outlaws are coming over to the mainland in canoes."

"Saw 'em from your tree?"

"I did."

"I thought my shot would bring 'em."

"I didn't."

"I know you didn't."

"Why did you?"

"I've known Saugeen Sam for some years."

"So you told me."

"He isn't a coward."

"I fancy that is correct."

"You can be; when he heard that gun-shot he knew that there was some trouble somewhere and he is the kind of a fellow that wants to git into the center of any trouble in these diggings."

"Why?"

"He knew he had—well that he and I were on the outs, and he knew why because I told him why when I left his camp after refusing to deal further with him—and let me tell you, Sam when he heard that shot connected me up with it in a jiffy; now being Sam he isn't takin' no chances any where that you Dave, the Trapper and I will do what he would call 'git together' to smoke him out. So he was bound to come ashore and see who fired that shot. And you have just told me that he is coming, eh?"

"That's true. You read Sam's actions aright."

"That is I've lured him here?"

"Sure."

"Had he many of his gang with him?"

"There were two canoes that left Rat Island. I could not make out exactly how many there were in the canoes but I should say there were five men."

"Only five? That's lucky! Why, five men probably is all that's left of Sam's gang now on the island—I suppose we can count on meeting Alsek, the Chipewyan, Sam, himself, and probably Ponce Plassey and Jimmy The Dip."

"Now mind you, I'm not saying there were five men in the canoe exactly. It looked to me as if there

were five; there may have been only three or four, for the canoes were a long way off. Almost three quarters of a mile."

"That's far even as high up as you were to make an exact count—any way I don't care how many there are. Sam's entire band may come for all I care. I don't give two bites of a cherry for the whole bandit gang. We've got a 'frame-up' here that will fool 'em, I think."

"It ought to—where's Dave Irving?"

"Oh, he is lyin' out ready to shoot when called on. Dave's thirsting for his vengeance. It looks to me as if he was going to get it, don't it?"

"It begins to."

"Has he a place where he can get in some good shots? Dave is a crackerjack when he gets his gun going."

"You bet he has a good place."

"All the rest of you black suited gents got reserved seats?"

"Yes. Every man has an orchestra chair, red-silk one, cushions make you want to go to sleep—everything comfortable even to umbrella-rack, opera-glasses, and candy and chewing gum, right attached to the seat."

"Good! Where are you going to put us?"

"You mean we two commanders?"

"You are the commander. I'm only a deputy-commander."

"Right here behind those trees in the shelter of what looks like a thicket of forest but which is really a thicket of strong trees, which will stop any flying bullet. This is a 'frame up' that I'm going to say I hope will not end in the injury to a single man on *our* side and will put the other gang outside the breastworks for ever. Here's where Saugeen Sam and his band get their finish."

"I must say that it looks highly probable that this will be the end of the Battle of Little Slave Lake, and it looks to me and I feel that I'm something of an expert in these matters seeing that it's my very business, that I expect soon *The Smugglers of Little Slave Lake* will be no more."

"Hurry and get to cover," cried The Black Rider. "We must not stand here talking longer. This gang of Sam's have a very uncomfortable habit of surprising one by doing the unexpected."

"That would be unfortunate. After arranging this unexpected camping party, eh? But where did you get the clothes and the tents?"

The Black Rider winked.

"That seems to be my business," he remarked. "It's a wise Royal North-West Mounted Policeman up here that knows enough to mind his business."

With the parting shot The Black Rider and Nate jumped into cover.

They were not a bit too soon for hardly had they entered their lair when there came running up the wide trail the form of an Indian scout.

When he saw the "framed up" camp of the hunters, he stood transfixed, then melted into the bushes, and was gone.

"That's the Chipewyan outlaw, Alsek," hissed Nate between his set teeth. "Leave him to Dave Irving—that Indian thug shot his wife!"

There was a note of cruelty in The Black Rider's laugh that followed the remarks of Nate Shelby's.

"All right," said The Black Rider. "Dave will get his chance in about four minutes. The outlaws will return in about that time to shoot that amateur bunch."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OUTLAW ATTACK.

"Is all ready?" asked Saugeen Sam of Ponce Plassey, as they hid in the underbrush that lay thick along the shores of Little Slave Lake.

"I don't know yit," cried Plassey. "I've sent thet thar Injun Alsek off ter scout out th' lay o' th' lan'. I 'spects he'll be back soon."

"Wall, I'd feel better ef I had some o' me men hyar."

Plassey flashed a quick glance at his chief.

"Yar goin' ter see yar man hyar or ut leastwise some uv 'em pretty soon old sport?" he said. "I've heern thet thars ten of the boys a comin' through them woods. They hiked back from Fort Kalsus. Ye see w'en we all hit the trail fer Fort Assinniboine half o' the gang thought dey'd fine good pickin' ter then Fort Kalus way an' they goes thar. See? The rest went ter Fort Assinniboine. See?"

"Yep."

"Wall, we'n the boys gits ter Fort Kalsus who der ye suppose was thar?"

"I dunno."

"A whole lot o' Mounted Policemen. Say, I heern thet thar was twenty ter thirty on um an', say, they was all talking Saugeen Sam."

"What?"

"That's what! They all was a talking Saugeen Sam and his band. Seems like thet they knaws ye was hyar——"

"Et's that 'tarnal skunk o' a Nate Shelby. Seems ter me he's thet feller what sends ter Fort Kalsus fer a lot o' them per-lece. Theys comin' in force ter shoot up Saugeen Sam and his band, eh?"

"Thet's wot the boys sez."

Sam suddenly became suspicious.

"W'en did ye git this hyar news?" he asked. "Say, Ponce, when did ye git th' news an' why didn't ye tell me 'fore this?"

"I got the news 'cause I was wit' th' boys what went ter Fort Kalsus, an' I heern tell uv th' lookin' fer ye. So I comes back hyar. I hurried so thet th' boys couldn't keep up wi' me an' w'en I gits back hyar ye was so busy et talkin' thet I didn't hev time to tell ye wot's happenin'—now, ye know, don't ye?"

"Yass. Wall, we will wait hyar till we see wot is happenin' along th' trail an' then we will come back er bit ter get a good runnin' start and then will hunt out that Mounted Cop and gin him a hustle fer his life. Et's erbout time we fit this game out between us."

Ponce Plassey winked and smiled.

"Yass," he said, "we gun-men hez gotter fite this hyar thing out now—some on us 'll git planted fore it's over. I fer one don't care. I've hed me good old gun in this hyar woild an' now it's comin' time ter cash in me checks and see de dealer stack 'em in that thar check-rack, w'y beau, I ain't ergoin' ter fin' no fault. I'm a gun-man wots lived by me gun and I ain't ergoin' ter kick wen a gun gives me mine. See?"

Sam nodded.

"Ye've been a good pal o' mine," Sam said. "I

hate ter see ye go out, Ponce, but I ain't goin' ter disguise de fac' thet we ain't goin' ter git outen this hole we are in."

"Oh, I dunno. Sicker men then we is hez lived."

"Wall, I dunno. I gits me warnin!"

"Wot?"

"Yass. I git's me warnin'. I tell ye——"

Here Sam told Plassey of the warning sent to him by The Black Rider.

"Ye gits that on Rat Island? Say, w'y didn't ye kill the nigger thet brung it?" yelled Plassey.

"I was flabbergasted," replied Saugeen Sam. "I didn't knaw witch way ter toin. I was that knocked in er heap thet, by Hokey, 'fore I thinks o' ut the nigger hed made his sneak. 'Twas too late—say Ponce, I was struck dumb an' blind."

"I don't blame ye. Thet Black Rider hed all our secrets. Say, he's bin buying our stuff fer years, haint he?"

"Shore."

"W'at he got sore on—that shootin' up of the Irvin' place?"

"Thet an' the shootin' up o' Miss Irvin' by Alsek. The thievin' son of a wolf-dog outen ter be killed fer it, but I sez ter meself he'll git *his* wit'out me interferin' from thet trapper Dave, the hus'an' o' Miss Irvin'. So I didn't take no action. Wisht I hed now."

"W'y?"

"Them Injuns ain't no use ter any men on our line I've find outen. Say, it was you wot tells me thet long time ergo, haint it?"

"Yep. I never had no use fer a red man er a nigger in any band. They's don't see nuttin' our way, they's red er they's nigger every time an' a tryin' ter mix breeds didn't do no good in bands an' it don't do no good in marryin'."

"Thet's right,' sadly replied Sam. "Ef there's a more oranery critter on this yarth than a half breed Injun or a half breed nigger I'd like to know whar he is."

"I kin tell ye."

"Whar is he?"

"Outen them wilds somewhar. I think a wild-cat is erbout w'at ye git w'en ye marry's a white ter an Injun or a half white nigger gal ter a white man. I never seen no kids o' marriages of them kind that weren't so mean thet they cayan't live wit' themselves let alone other people."

"Yar right. I've made a mistake in this hyar a takin' on o' red-men in my band. I wisht I hadn't. But say, poddner Ponce, I'll tell ye one ting an' ye put it in yar pipe en smoke et."

"Wall?"

"Thar ain't ergoin' ter be so many Injuns ez they was in Sam's band w'en the fight we is about ter git inter is over. I may hez cashed me checks in, but ef I hev thar will be a few o' me red-men going erlong wit' me."

"Wall, I'm glad ter hear thet. I suppose them wot started th' red race knows what they did it fer. Them thet made niggers fust prob'ly knew why, but I don't know why, eh? Say, so fer as my experanc' hez gone an' it ain't never got further then gun-men games, they ain't a red man er a nigger thet's wuth much as an outlaw. What ever they's kin do a white man can do better, quicker and cheaper."

Sam did not wish to argue this point.

He laughed grimly.

"Say, ye out ter form a laborin' trust fer bandits wit' white men only admitted?" Sam said. "Ye is pretty bitter on red men and niggers? I know some pretty decent red men and some fine niggers. They's good and bad red men an' good and bad niggers. I guess they's averages up pretty much like white men."

Ponce shook his head. He was unconvinced and wasn't able to argue the matter further. In fact it didn't seem to him that there was anything to argue, for he thought he was right and that his argument was unanswerable.

Sam on his side thought he was equally right and the two men, moody with their different points of view, sat on a log in the shade of a big tree and awaited the return of their scout.

Minutes passed and finally there was heard the soft tramp of hurrying, moccasined feet.

The feet and the moccasins belonged to Alsek, who strode into view going forward with his swift half lope, half run of the wild red-man, which covers ground so swiftly and yet seems not to be hasty in scope or performance.

"Waugh!" said Alsek when he reached the two waiting white men.

"Wall," said Saugeen Sam, "I see ye bring news."

"Yep," replied Alsek with gleaming eyes.

"Wall tell us th' news," growled Plassey who did not like the red-man and who had a habit of showing his likes and dislikes.

"Feather bed hunters," said Alsek.

The two whites exchanged glances.

They all well knew what this meant.

It was plain "Injun" for amateur sportsmen, so named because of their habit of sleeping in the early dawn of the days which the real professional hunter knows is the time to get at the work of trapper, or shooting, for it is at early dawn that some of the best catches are made before the wild world sinks to its lair for the day.

"Whar are these hyar 'feather-bed' hunters?" asked Sam.

"Bout mile. I see trail. Come by lake. Ugh!" replied Alsek.

"Whar did ye spot 'um?" asked Plassey keenly alive to the news.

"Playing picture game by tents," the Indian answered.

"They was playin' cyards, eh?" put in Sam.

"Yep," replied Alsek.

"How many was they in th' party?" asked Sam.

"Bout four—five maybe."

The Indian said the greater part of his sentence in one breath in his excitement.

"See whar they hed thar weepins?" continued Sam.

Alsek shook his head in the negative.

"Don't know what guns they's carried?" anxiously remarked Plassey.

The Indian shook his head again.

"See no gun," Alsek added.

"Ain't them tenderfeet the mussy limit?" disgustedly asked Plassey. "They don't seem ter git no sense ever drummed inter them. They knaws we air pretty well li'ble ter shoot them up, or ef we don't thar'll be others o' gangs like us in this hyar country thet will, an' they sets down ter play cyards—poker prob'ly—an' gamblin' away is they wit' death at thar heels, fer we are goin' ter shoot up thet thar party o'

tenderfoot hunters jest as sure ez I'm a foot high."

"Good medicine!" cried Alsek, who dearly loved a fight. He was all Indian and human suffering appealed to him as the pleasantest thing in the world to witness.

Sam's face was gloomy.

"Hole' up thet gang o' amerchooers is jest what I've been a dyin' ter find de chanst ter do fer the las' year. I've got outen tents, and guns uv the latest pattern, and say poddner, this hyar partee o' tenderfeet is jest what I've been lookin' fer these many moons. I guess we'll hev ter do them up, bury 'em whar they won't be found an' con-fis-cate thar goods en chatteles."

Taciturn Ponce Plassey was also feeling fine under the circumstances. His usually somber visage was as smiling as a May morning and he was all alertness and quick vigor.

"I need er new tent," he said happily, "an ef thar's some good boots in them fellers kits thet will fit me, say, Sam, see I gits 'em!"

"I need one o' them new mag-zeen guns. This hyar one o' mine's all right but it can't pump me out lead fast enough—they say thet they's a new gun on the market thet'll bust mine wide open in th' way o' throwin' lead—an' ye kin bet that these har tou-reests is agoin' ter have everythin' new thets in the sportin' goods market—half the trucks wot ye sees wit' them chaps is made ter sell ter them."

"Right ye are! I knaw a feller wot cums outen hyar a shootin' oncet, an' it tuck three pack mules ter carry his outfit."

"What?"

"Thet's right. I met thet feller in them woods back of Helldiver Gate, ye knaw, over by Dead Man's Gulch, and say, Petey, take it frum me, he was a holy sight. I sez ter him 'movin' onter the woods fer good?' An' he sez 'Huh?' An' I sez 'wot ye done back thar—shootin' up too much? Or stealin', er rustlin' cattle or what?' He sez 'Me good man, you annoy me. I ain't er goin' ter *live* outen hyar, I jest cums out natch'ly like ter shoot en fish.' I sez 'How long ye goin' ter stay?' He sez 'ten days.' 'My Gawd,' I sez, 'man, are ye goin' ter bring all thet truck outen hyar ter stay only *ten days* wit'?' He sez, 'W'y I ain't got hardly annytin'. I brung a freight car full of real nice campin' outfit an' say, w'en the rail-road petered eout, thar want no way ter do but leave the best part o' me outfit."

Ponce Plassey listened open-mouthed to this true tale.

He shook his hands at Sam with the gesture of a man who says: "Oi! Oi! Aind it?"

"I don't be'leeve thet yarn," Plassey added. "Yar a lyin. No man would be stich a darned fool. Tenderfoots don't knaw much but they ain't plumb locoed."

"Naw really, Ponce, I'm givin' it ter ye straight," rejoined Sam.

Ponce turned away with a disgusted face.

"I onny hopes," he said, "that them hunters we hev hyar are loaded down like the feller yar tellin' erbout. My, ef they is, we ain't goin' ter git th' dandy outfit er nothin'—now Sam suppose ye tells us wot ye tinks is ther best way ter fight them chaps."

"Don't need no fitin' with them chaps," said Sam. "Jest turn loose and shoot 'em up. W'en it's over bury 'em. Then take th' plunder and back ter the island—ah, hyar comes the boys! We mount is well git them campers o' tenderfeet cleaned up 'fore we go ter supper. Then we kin usen thar things fer ter cook our suppers wit'—they won't need no campin' outfit whar they's goin'."

All of the foregoing conversations have been faithfully reported just because it shows how well the lure of The Black Rider had been spread.

The bandits "fell for it" in the very way that The Black Rider thought they would.

Never was a neater plan put up.

Which goes to show that the old saw, "set a thief to catch a thief" in this case, was pretty nearly right; for, while The Black Rider would probably be angered if known as a thief, he by his own statement to Nate Shelby had "fenced", for thieves!

"Wall, we mount ez well jest natch'ly de-vide our band an see ef we kin get to that thar huntin' outfit in a hurry. Come on boys!"

Saugeen Sam with some ideas of generalship sent Ponce Plassey to the rear of the place where the decoy camp was built; and he himself took charge of the main body of attackers, which were to rush forward shooting and yelling at the top of their voices in true bandit style.

The way to the point where the camp could be seen was soon negotiated.

As luck would have it the party under Sam halted in the shade right within short shot of the place where Nate Shelby and The Black Rider were hidden.

"Hush-h!" cried The Black Rider in his soft voice when he saw the crouching detachment of bandits issue from the woods with Saugeen Sam in the lead. "Here they come! Nate, get your gun all ready! There'll be hot work here in a few minutes."

Nate Shelby raised his deadly rifle. He knew now that The Black Rider had "put up a plot that would 'come over'!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE OF LITTLE SLAVE LAKE.

With the ear-splitting whoops of his kind the band of outlaw members opened the battle.

Shots mingled with the outlaws' yells.

The shots were all directed at the card party of dummies seated in the camp of the supposed "feather-bed hunters."

"Shoot at 'em," cried Saugeen Sam. "Shoot 'em into strings!"

"Thar goes thet big feller," shrieked Ponce Plassey.

From his eye-hole in a tree branch, The Black Rider snickered.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Nate Shelby.

"It's so funny," replied The Black Rider. "That chap, you know, the big gink of an outlaw, Ponce Plassey—well, he hit that log of wood with the soft wide-felt hat on directly in the very center of the hats, the last shot he took at the hunters."

"Nothing funny about that is there?" inquired Nate.

"Yes," rejoined The Black Rider, "when you see that the shot has twisted the hat about so that it is perched rakishly over the ear of the alleged man—he looks so perky and happy to be where Ponce can waste good lead on him."

Nate looked disgusted.

"You don't seem to see," he remarked, "that those bandits are taking what we know to be a ruse as being the good goods. They think they are *killing* a party of inoffensive pleasure seekers, for the sake of mere

wanton *robbery*. You look upon it all as a mere spectacle in which the outlaws are being *fooled*."

"I admit that I never had much imagination. You ought to be able to make a vivid picture of things if you had a pot of paint and a brush—or any way you ought to paint a house in an artistic manner!"

"There's lots of good sign painters that ought to be artists and there's lots of artists that ought to be good sign painters," remarked Nate.

The Black Rider replied by a covert wink.

While there was joviality in the minds of The Black Rider and of Nate, Dave Irving, the aged trapper, was only filled with a feeling of blood-lust.

The old man lay hidden behind a big log.

His hand gripped his rifle so that the veins stood out upon it like whipcords.

His face was white and his eyes were two great coal-like fires in his drawn white face.

"Wait! Just a few moments more," Dave whispered to himself. "Just a few moments more—then comes *The Trapper's Vengeance!*"

As for the outlaws?

They were extremely happy.

They fired away thinking that they riddled the hunting-party they were attacking at every possible angle.

"Say, them fellers don't seem ter move," cried Plassey. "They's ain't er doin' nuttin' toward gittin' to thar guns—whar's the rest o' our boys? W'y don't they git hyar?"

"I dunno. Say, shall we rush them hunters now?" asked Saugeen Sam.

"I wisht them other boys was hyar. Say, they outen ter be hyar. I hate ter rush them fellers an' hez 'em run back inter the woods. Some on 'em might git away from us and wander back ter thet Mounted Cop party an' then they 'uld git arter us wuss then ever. Ter make this game win fer us der mustn't be one o' them hunters left alive. See?"

Plassey nodded.

In this world there is a lot of things that count in little battles on Little Slave Lake, and in bigger battles in foreign fields.

The verdict of Waterloo might not have been the one finally given if there had been no sunken-road near Quatre Bras!

And the battle of Little Slave Lake might have been different as to its ending also, had Sam known that behind the hunter-tents was a deep ravine, or canyon, probably twenty-five to fifty feet wide and which went down to the bowels of the earth for many hundred feet.

The forest grew so sturdily along the canyon's edge on both its sides that until the flanking attacking party reached it they did not know of its existence.

"Cain't git over thar—canyon stops us," cried Jimmy The Dip, who was in command of the attacking party in the flanking movement.

This was why, even after much expenditure of ammunition and many yells, nothing was heard of this party led by Jimmy, the main attackers under Saugeen Sam.

The Black Rider chuckled mightily all the time, for he had laid out the lure and as he expressed it "I wasn't looking for anything but the best end of it when I laid out the battle-field."

In other words, The Black Rider by his superior knowledge of "the game" had split up the forces of the bandits without firing a shot.

The Black Rider explained all this to Nate Shelby in a whisper.

"I kinder smelled the fact that while on its face it looked as if we had only a few men to contend with there *might be more*. I always plan things to lick the number I know about and to take on about double the number of foemen, that *I don't know about*, and if necessary lick them too!"

"You are a wonder," said Nate.

"Ain't I?" cried The Black Rider. "Put all kind of crowns on me and I'd make quite a hero—now, wouldn't I? But there goes over *something*."

It was a fine, very real "something" with a good round capital "S."

Jimmy The Dip rode to the rescue.

When he found his command hemmed in as it were by the deep canyon, Jimmy in some way got an axe or two and soon there was a fine chopping away at the butt of a great tree which stood near the edge of the canyon with its trunk inclined toward the further side from where the bandits stood.

Jimmy argued quickly that here was his chance.

"Fell dat tree over dat can-yeen," he howled to his men, "an' we hez a fine natural bridge ter cross on! See?"

They all "saw" and went to "sawing" and chopping with a will.

The tree came down with a splendid whirl of breaking branches and flying leaves, directly across the canyon.

As it fell, Saugeen Sam, who saw what had kept his men back, and what the falling of the tree meant, jumped upon the log, behind which he had been shooting at the supposed peaceful hunters, and gave a shrill yell.

"Charge!" he yelled.

He rushed up the steep hill for the camp, followed by Ponce Plassey and the rest of the bandits under Sam's charge.

At the same moment Jimmy The Dip darted over the tree to the aid of his chief.

Behind both men streamed the outlaws, howling, cursing and shooting like a great flock of demons.

"*Fire*—shoot low boys," came the voice of The Black Rider, followed in a second by the shrill note of his whistle, to which Nate Shelby added the deeper shrilling of the whistle always carried for signal purposes by the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

As if the whistle had galvanized him into life, Dave Irving, the old Trapper, jumped from his concealment.

His rifle lay in his outstretched hands like a part of the old man.

Every nerve of the trapper was tense with purpose.

His eye traveled along the snake-like dull steel tube of his weapon.

He aimed at the running form of Saugeen Sam.

Sam, in answer to a sudden startled yell of Ponce Plassey's who had caught sight of the trapper, turned.

Sam saw the trapper; he sensed his danger; he tried to sing to cover—

The weapon roared!

Saugeen Sam stopped in his half crouching position.

He straightened up to his full height, then spun to the right, half turned and fell like the tree over which Jimmy The Dip had just passed, in a great wreck of disaster.

But before Saugeen Sam's dead body plunged to the

ground a second shot from the old trapper's rifle struck him.

The trapper had sent another of the bullets from his weapon into the dead body of the bandit chief.

Ponce Plassey open-mouthed had witnessed the death of his chief.

The entire tragedy had happened with such lightening-like flashes that the benumbed brain of the living outlaw had not quickly grasped the terror of the episode.

Then he awoke.

"Ambushed!" he yelled. "Down every one!"

The order changed the battle in a moment.

The outlaws sank to earth.

Not a head, not even a finger, could be seen.

Intense silence filtered over the scene.

All there was in sight, now, seemed to be the body of Saugeen Sam, which lay with its white face turned toward the sky, dead, with all its plans, it hopes, its fears come to a sudden and violent death in a vast wilderness.

The death of Sam pointed its own moral to the still living outlaws.

For a few moments all was stillness.

Then Alsek started things.

"Trust an Indian for 'starting things' in the way of battle and bloodshed," said The Black Rider to Nate Shelby.

"Well, it won't do them any good, will it?" asked Nate.

"Not a thing," returned The Black Rider. "I ordered my men to close in behind the bandits and when they did so to fire one shot."

As he spoke the shot came hurtling from the forest.

Plassey knew what it meant as well as did The Black Rider and Nate.

"We are hemmed in! They've got us in the rear!" Plassey howled.

"To that thar bridge," yelled Jimmy The Dip. "Over th' bridge boys!"

"Thet's the game!" yelled Plassey. "Now, boys, git a move on ye!"

The Black Rider's voice could be heard like the screech of the great American eagle clear above all the sounds of the fight.

"Black Riders!" yelled their chief. *"Cut off the outlaws on the other side of the canyon!"*

To Nate Shelby it seemed as if the arrangements of The Black Rider chief had been inspired.

He had arranged to meet the very point the bandits were now making.

"I kinder thought that they'd do this," he said. "I had posted some men in ambush on the other side of that canyon," The Black Rider chief said calmly to Nate. "I could have stopped the felling of that tree, but it seemed, that while at first I was opposed to having the two outlaw parties get together, that as things shaped themselves it might be well for them to do so."

Alsek next tried to see if he could not change the tide of battle.

He wriggled himself like a human-snake toward Dave Irving.

In his teeth he held his knife.

His fearful face was painted in the hideous colors a savage uses to incite the natural love for blood that is inherent from his ancestors.

He was "painted war" and meant to take the toll that comes in the battle shock.

He wriggled toward Dave Irving!

Not a sound seemed to indicate that he was seen.

Nate and The Black Rider were busy elsewhere.

They did not notice this Indian attack.

Alsek at length wiggled to where he mounted the log under which he was sure Dave Irving was shielded.

No sound came.

Was the trapper asleep?

Had he been wounded in the battle?

Alsek took his knife from his hips.

He leaned over to dart a death blow at Dave.

But then Dave awoke.

His two great hairy-paws gripped Alsek.

One great twist of his keen hunting knife literally severed the head of the Indian outlaw from his body.

"The Trapper's Vengeance!" shrieked Dave as he jumped upon the log behind which he was hiding and waved the gory trophy in his hands.

The horrible act drove all fight from the hearts of the outlaws now.

Dave led the wild charge upon the bandits.

Strategy was thrown to the winds. It became now a man-to-man fight.

The outlaws broke and fled in the first three minutes of the fight and streamed over the tree toward what they hoped was safety in a panic stricken conglomeration of men.

Ponce Plassey and Jimmy The Dip seemed to vie with each other in acting as rear-guard.

Plassey was greviously wounded in the body at almost the first of the battle.

A shot sent into his body by The Black Rider had badly injured him; but he fought on with bull-dog courage.

Nate Shelby had shot thrice at Jimmy The Dip, but only one bullet had taken effect and it had neither stopped Jimmy, nor had it fatally wounded him!

At length the outlaws had gotten over the bridge all save Plassey and Jimmy.

A shot from Dave Irving's rifle brought Plassey to his knees.

Then Jimmy performed the final, and in fact the only great deed of his wicked, outlaw life.

He picked his fellow thug up, as if he had been a child. He threw the body of the injured man across his shoulders and rushed, bearing his burden, out on the quivering tree.

"Don't shoot!" yelled The Black Rider. "Let them escape. A man who does that kind of work is better alive than dead—even if he is an outlaw!"

Not a shot was fired at the two outlaws after these words.

All eyes were watching the two men.

But fate did not propose that life awaited the two bandits.

In mid-tree Jimmy stopped and wavered.

He saw a woman's form come from the further end of the tree.

The form was that of Mrs. David Irving, whom Jimmy had seen shot by the Indian thug, Alsek, in the raid of the Irving home so many weeks before the battle.

"The ghost again!" shrieked Jimmy.

His nerveless hands forgot its burden.

His trembling legs would not support him.

Into the depths below in the canyon they plunged, Jimmy The Dip, and his outlaw friend, Ponce Plassey.

"The Trapper's Vengeance!" shrieked a woman's voice. "Revenge! Revenge!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A HAPPY REUNION.

"My old woman!" yelled Dave the Trapper, in a higher key even than his wife.

The old man with tears streaming from his eyes, and his face white with his emotions rushed at his greatest speed over the tree, to where the form of the woman who had caused the death of the outlaws, had sank down upon the earth.

"My old man!" cried the woman, who was indeed Mrs. Dave Irving, alive and well.

The Black Rider chief and Nate Shelby hurried to the two re-united people. Such happiness in the midst of danger neither man had seen.

"Alive? Alive?" cried Dave. "How——"

"He can explain," said Mrs. Irving pointing to the Black Rider.

"It's simple at best," the Black Rider laughed. "My name is Howard Wilson. I am a member of the American Mounted Scouts, a body of men, akin in the United States to The Royal North-West Mounted Police here. For years I have been engaged in getting evidence that would convict Saugeen Sam's gang of the crime of smuggling. They thought I acted as a 'fence' for them in Chicago while as a matter of fact the goods they sent me were turned over to my government who furnished the money necessary to placate the gang and get my case more complete—well, with a party of my men I came out here to wind up my game by the arrest of the leaders of the band. I have warrants for the arrest of all the outlaws concerned as leaders and was going to execute them and take my men back to the United States quietly. When I found Nate Shelby on the job for his Mounted Police force—well, I just aided in exterminating the outlaws—that seemed quite as effectual as to take them back to my side of the border and saved lots of expense. On the way to this scene I found Mrs. Irving lying beside her burning home insensible. I used all the things that you see from our kit—decorated the big colored man who waits on me and sent him out to the outlaws with the Death warning. He, like all the rest of my scheme, was a trifle theatric, but it *won.*"

The Black Rider looked about.

Three men bound together was all that was left of Saugeen Sam's gang.

"You can have 'em Shelby," cried The Black Rider. "Take them any where you wish and try them—my mission is done!"

Holding his good wife's hand in his, Dave Irving looked over the scene.

Then he laughed.

"*This is my vengeance!*" roared the fur-trader.

THE END.

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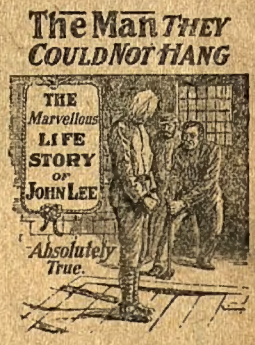

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No. 7.	FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STAND	or The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon
No. 8.	A DASH FOR LIFE	or Tricked by Timber Wolves
No. 9.	THE DECOY MESSAGE	or The Ruse of the Border Jumpers
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No. 12.	LURED BY OUTLAWS	or The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride

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February	23—No. 13.	STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE	or The Bandits of Great Bear Lake
March	2—No. 14.	THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH	or The Ghost of Horn Mountains
March	9—No. 15.	THE TREASURES OF MACKENZIE ISLES	or The Outlaw's Drag-Net
March	16—No. 16.	HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN	or The Renegade's Death-Vote
March	23—No. 17.	THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH	or The Desperado of Poker Flat
March	30—No. 18.	THE RED MASSACRE	or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands
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April	13—No. 20.	HOUNDED BY RED MEN	or The Road Agents of Porcupine River
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May	4—No. 23.	NIGHT RIDERS OF THE NORTHWEST	or The Vigilantes' Revenge
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